The Washington Monthly

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Eleanor Clift on the Clinton White House

Clarence Page on Jesse Jackson

25 years of "Doonesbury," plus J. Anthony Lukas and Colman McCarthy

CAMPAIGN '96

The Dole Record

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

★ THE QUESTIONS CAMPAIGN REPORTERS SHOULD ASK

★ NOTES OF AN OPPOSITION RESEARCHER

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Those days have come . . . and gone.

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– Allow qualified Americans of diverse backgrounds and perspectives to seek public office regardless of their personal wealth or their access to wealth.

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– Eliminate the inevitable conflicts of interest created when big money buys elections and the special interest replaces the public interest.

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– Provide all Americans access to their government and their elected representatives regardless of their ability to make campaign contributions.

STOP THE MONEY CHASE

– Place the people's business first by freeing elected public servants from the money chase that distracts them from the responsibilities of governing.

Campaign finance reform . . . as if democracy mattered. Because it does.

Center for Responsive Politics

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The Washington Monthly

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Letters

Divorced from the Mob

On behalf of the 750,000 members of the Laborers' International Union of North America, I must express my regret that you chose to publish "An F.O.B. and the Mob" (May). Messrs. Mulligan and Starkman are hell-bent on sensationalism and have chosen to ignore the facts.

Numerous individuals over whom union leadership has no control—including former Assistant U.S. Attorney Allan Taffett, LIUNA's Inspector General Douglas Gow, General Executive Board Attorney Robert Luskin, real estate appraisers in Rhode Island, and members of the U.S. Attorney's Office and the FBI—have reported full cooperation about the real story behind LIUNA's reform to *The Journal Bulletin* only to be shocked by the glaring bias, omissions, and erroneous reporting that appeared in the paper. Time and again, LIUNA has received reports of the *Journal* reporters' efforts with third parties to try to create stories of wrongdoing and misconduct where none exists, and to disregard the truth if it interfered in any way with their preconceived notions.

While Starkman and Mulligan suggest that certain *unnamed* federal law enforcement personnel outside Washington are unhappy about the Laborers' internal reform procedures, they identify only Craig Oswald, Assistant U.S. Attorney, who has indicated that he was badly misquoted in the article. In addition, these reporters ignore the fact that federal courts in Washington, Buffalo, and Chicago have not only upheld, but applauded, the union's process.

The authors' unattributed suggestion that Arthur Coia and the Justice Department somehow conspired to strengthen Coia's "grip" on the union is inexplicable. In fact, the General President and Secretary-Treasurer will be required to stand for election before the rank-and-file membership later this year. This will mark the first popular election in the union's 93-year history, and it exemplifies far greater democracy than is practiced in most unions.

The article also suggests that there is more organized crime influence in the Laborers' Union today than there was a year ago, in spite of well-publicized events to the contrary. In the past 12 months, a mob-dominated local in Buffalo has been purged of Mafia influence; the Mason Tenders District Council in New York City has been reorganized to reduce the potential for corruption; dozens of cases at local affiliates have been investigated, charges have been brought, and numerous individuals have been forced to leave the union. Attempts to challenge the reorganization in federal courts have ended in summary judgments upholding its propriety.

They call that agreement "toothless," citing concessions that the government made to LIUNA. In fact, the government made no concessions. It is monitoring LIUNA's internal reform procedures, and the Department of Justice can step in and take over the union any time it decides that the union isn't getting the job done. Unlike the other unions that were under Justice Department scrutiny, LIUNA admitted it had problems that needed reform. Despite the article's assertion, Coia never denied that corruption existed.

That information, as well as detailed descriptions of the actions taken to carry out reform, has been made available to your authors in the past. They have conducted lengthy interviews with General President Coia, GEB Attorney Robert Luskin, and Inspector General Doug Gow.

But we have found that "setting the record straight" with these two individuals is not only impossible, but an exercise in frustration.

Carl E. Booker
International Vice President,
General Executive Board, LIUNA

Your story on LIUNA is a punishing mixture of falsehoods, half-truths, speculation, and outright fantasy. LIUNA's so-called "sweetheart" deal with the government is anything but. According to Mulligan and Starkman, the agreement "essentially asked Coia to clean up the Laborers' act—on his own terms." In fact, it is this: If the government concludes that LIUNA's self-reform effort has faltered—or, as Mulligan and Starkman accuse, it was embarked upon in bad faith—the government is free at any time to pull the plug. The agreement expressly confers on the Department of Justice the absolute discretion, for a period of three years, to impose a Consent Decree on LIUNA.

Unlike other "deals" the government has negotiated with unions accused of mob corruption, the arrangement with LIUNA does not tie the government's hands in any fashion. Now, or at any time since the agreement was signed, the government—including the disgruntled but unnamed "law enforcement sources"—has remained free to indict any union member or seek court supervision of any LIUNA body. That the government has not exercised this power even once stands as rather persuasive proof of LIUNA's successes; not politics or bad faith.

Two separate federal courts have

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found that there is literally no evidence to support the allegation that LIUNA entered into its agreement in bad faith, to protect General President Coia, or as part of a secret political deal with the Department of Justice. All of these charges, which Mulligan and Starkman attribute to unnamed sources, were the subject of litigation commenced by deposed Vice Presidents Caivano and Serpico and a handful of locals in Chicago and Buffalo with the most to lose from reform. Not surprisingly, they were unable to prove it, even with extensive discovery, including a two-day deposition of Luskin and summary judgment to LIUNA.

Likewise, directly contrary to what Mulligan and Starkman assert, the suit brought by former Vice President Caivano was not "settled on financial terms favorable to Caivano" before Judge Sullivan's questions about President Coia could be answered. Judge Sullivan considered the questions and concluded that there was no evidence to support a finding of bad faith. He found instead that LIUNA's GEB had acted responsibly in adopting the reform process and granted summary judgment in favor of LIUNA, Coia, and the members of the GEB against Caivano. The statements in the article are simply false.

The "deal" on election reform was expressly approved by the Attorney General and a U.S. Attorney. Far from guaranteeing the power of Coia or any other incumbent, it requires direct rank and file election of the General President and General Secretary-Treasurer, provides for the election of regional vice presidents answerable to the membership, reforms the convention process and institutes secret ballots, and requires the appointment of an independent Elections Officer, approved by the government, to ensure that the election is fair, "honest, open, and democratic."

The account of Serpico's disciplinary proceedings is virtually unencumbered by the truth. It was false of Starkman and Mulligan to state that Luskin "called a recess" and offered to settle "minutes before" General President Coia was to be subjected to cross-examination. In fact, the recess —which was called by the Independent Hearing Officer, not Luskin—came after, not *before*, Serpico's attorneys began to cross-examine Coia. The settlement discussions that ensued were initiated by Serpico's lawyers, not Luskin. And far from seeking to muzzle Serpico or to protect Coia, the agreement expressly *permitted* Serpico to maintain his federal lawsuit against Coia, raising all of the accusations of bad faith that Mulligan and Starkman recite. Serpico's lawyers and others later examined Coia under oath for two full days about the charges. The result only sounds like a coverup if it is deliberately misstated.

Carl Stern, the Justice Department spokesman, aptly characterized the central theme of Mulligan and Starkman's article as "moronic." Misstating the record, concealing material facts, and dodging the truth is something more. It is dishonest.

Robert D. Luskin
Comey, Boyd, and Luskin
Washington, D.C.

Dean Starkman and John Mulligan reply: Mr. Luskin and Mr. Booker can call us all the names they want, but the essential point remains: There is no good reason why LIUNA's reform process is answerable only to internal union officials and not to a federal judge.

On Jan. 12, 1995, a month before the final deal was signed, Paul Coffey, chief of the Justice Department's Organized Crime and Racketeering Section, wrote Mr. Luskin to summarize the "non-negotiable" elements the government deemed "essential" for true reform: judicial oversight and a court-appointed cleanup team. "We insist on a consent decree that creates court-appointed officers acting under exclusive jurisdiction of the court ... we cannot agree to delegate the investigative and disciplinary authority to offi-

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cers who are accountable to sources inside of the union.... We have no confidence and certainly no guarantee that an internal investigative process that is not subject to the court's direct control and influence will result in anything close to the effective reform and corrective action needed to remove LCN control and influence from the union."

Just so. And yet, that is exactly what the final deal does: hand over disciplinary authority to the union, or, as the government once called it, the "racketeering enterprise." It is easy to understand why Mr. Luskin and Mr. Coia would want such a sweetheart deal. But will anyone explain why Justice would?

The rest of Mr. Luskin's letter seems to attack an article we didn't write. We never said any individual is protected from government civil or criminal action. And Mr. Luskin is, at best, disingenuous in citing the Sullivan and Zagel decisions. Both rulings were on narrow issues regarding the legality of moves made by the general executive board in January 1995. When, for instance, Judge Sullivan mentions "bad faith," he was ruling only on whether the board could legally change the union's constitution, ethics code, and disciplinary procedures. The judge stresses that the "limited" scope of his ruling did "not extend to a trial on the merits." Judge Zagel specifically says that he was not ruling on any aspect of the government's decision to enter into the agreement.

As for the Serpico hearing, if the hearing officer called for the recess, we stand corrected. And Serpico's lawyers did begin a cross-examination of Mr. Coia, but the key word is "begin." It lasted a few minutes and dwelled on the union's organizational structure. Of course, everyone would know what happened if Mr. Luskin had not agreed to seal the file of this proceeding. And the larger truth remains: The proceeding was shut down before it could get to the heart of the cross-examination of Mr. Coia.

As for union elections, will Carl Stern or someone else at Justice explain to us morons why rank-and-file members are not allowed to vote in direct elections for the entire general executive board? And will Mr. Luskin explain why he and Mr. Coia fought so hard to keep it that way?

As for Mr. Booker's point about Assistant U.S. Attorney Oswald: While he disagrees with many of the article's conclusions, he acknowledges making the statement we said he made.

Mr. Booker also says union leadership has "no control" over Mr. Gow and Mr. Luskin. The fact is that Mr. Coia and the union hired them both. Mr. Coia and the union paid Mr. Gow $123,645.09 last year. As for Mr. Luskin, he says he's billed the union at least $500,000.

Overclassed

Merit pay for teachers is a bad idea ("Bill Clinton on How to Save the Public Schools," May). Developing criteria is difficult, and the issue of who makes the decisions becomes contentious. The potential for envy is strong, which often impairs cooperation among teachers. It would be better to hire more teachers in order to boost the teacher-to-student ratio. Overloaded teachers are less effective—the less conscientious become incompetent and the more conscientious burn out. If teaching is as rewarding as Charles Peters keeps reminding the young idealists bound for law school, merit pay is a weak incentive for doing a good job. Having the time to do the right thing by kids is necessary to gain the moral and spiritual rewards of teaching. A 20 to 25 percent reduction in class sizes will be necessary if the other reforms advocated by the *Monthly* and President Clinton are to be achieved.

Dave Corkran
Portland, OR

Not a Bad IDEA

In my two decades as an avid reader of *The Washington Monthly*, I cannot recall an article as illiberal in tone as Dante Chinni's "A Bad IDEA" (May).

If Mr. Chinni had peered further into the trenches, he might have realized IDEA is not some half-baked boondoggle. As a hearing-impaired person since early childhood and a past president and board member of the Indiana chapter of the Alexander Graham Bell Association, I can personally testify to the struggle of parents of mainstreamed hearing-impaired children, and parents of other handicapped children, to give their children a fighting chance to succeed socially and economically. I have seen those children, thanks in part to the assistive listening devices and the oral and sign interpreters made possible by IDEA, run with their educational opportunity and achieve success.

Mr. Chinni proposes all handicapped children be fed into a few broad educational programs to save money rather than offering the individualized education program for each child required by IDEA. His proposal ignores the substantial evidence that each child, each handicap, is different.

Scott Kingdon
Fort Wayne, IN

Where There's Smoke...

Kudos to *The New Republic* reporter-researcher Michael Crowley for his brilliant exposé of the slimy advertisers on the Rush Limbaugh show ("Rush's Medicine Show," May). Imagine running ads for products like Melatonex (also advertised in *Newsweek*) and BreathAsure (for sale at my local hospital gift shop).

Now, perhaps, Crowley will treat us to a moral justification of the full-page cigarette ad that graces the back cover of the April 8, 1996, issue of *The New Republic*.

Jonathan D. Muehl
Pittsburgh, PA

Correction

In the May issue, "Rush's Medicine Show" incorrectly referred to the Sunsource product "Rejuvex," a dietary supplement for menopausal women, as "Rejuvenex," a face cream which is the product of an unaffiliated company. We regret the error.

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Tilting at Windmills

I hesitate to accuse *The New York Times* of snobbery. But over the years I have noticed the remarkable frequency with which photographs of Brooke Astor have graced its Styles section. Recently, she appeared on two straight Sundays—May 26 and June 2. Doubtless Mrs. Astor's many good works have something to do with this generous coverage, but we can't help suspecting that it is also not unrelated to the fact that she is Mrs. Astor....

Remember the dedicated efforts Republicans made to sabotage motor-voter legislation? Republicans in Congress opposed it. George Bush vetoed the bill the first time it was passed. But now that Bill Clinton and the Democrats finally got a bill enacted in 1993, guess who is the beneficiary? The GOP. Or so it appears from early signs. In Florida, according to *The Wall Street Journal*'s John Harwood, motor-voter registrants are mostly Republican. And in Kentucky, although they are mostly Democratic, they are so by a considerably smaller margin than the state's other registered voters. The Florida margin is truly astonishing—392,493 Republican motor-voters and only 292,719 Democrats....

Although the press is full of stories of vice, many observers have lamented, articles in praise of virtue are rare. That is why I was struck when an example of the rare kind recently came to my attention. It was a story by Frank A. Aukofer of *The Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* praising retired Congressman Bob Kastenmeier for not cashing in on his Hill expertise after he was defeated in 1990. As chairman of a House Judiciary subcommittee with jurisdiction over patents, copyrights, and trademarks, he had gained a mastery of a subject that others similarly situated have turned into big bucks. For instance, Dennis DeConcini, who chaired a similar subcommittee in the Senate before his departure from public life a few years ago, now has clients such as Pfizer, Upjohn, the Motion Picture Association of America, and the Recording Industry Association of America. Four former staff members on Kastenmeier's subcommittee are also now profiting from knowledge they obtained and contacts they made during their public duties. But not Kastenmeier. Why?

"I didn't want to [lobby] because I felt I would be, in a sense, abusing the fact that as a member on a subcommittee, I was in a position to notably affect legislation in that area." It could, in other words, appear that he was being paid off as a lobbyist for what he had done as a member of Congress. Equally improper, Kastenmeier believes, would be the possibility that he would be placed in the position of advocating positions for a client contrary to what he had pursued in the public interest as a member.

Kastenmeier is right. The other guys are wrong. And bless the *Journal-Sentinel* for letting Kastenmeier's friends, neighbors, and constituents know about the choice he made....

When D.C. Control Board Chairman Andrew Brimmer demanded that Mayor Marion Barry fire Human Services Director Vernon Hawkins for incompetence, Barry defended Hawkins, saying he had done a good job. The evidence Barry offered was that Hawkins had attended the mayor's town meetings....

I regard *The Washington Times* as a useful paper, as you may have gathered from the number of times I quote it. But sometimes its conservatism causes too much of a tilt in its editing and reporting. Take President Clinton's proposal to give $1,500-a-year tax credits for two years of college. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* put the story on page one. *The Washington Times* put it on page 4. In itself, that wasn't too bad, but it got worse when combined with the fact that the *Times* devoted the entire top of its front page to Whitewater stories. One of those was about the fingerprints the FBI found on Hillary Clinton's billing records. It was not until the 17th paragraph of the story that the *Times* mentioned this crucial fact: None of the fingerprints on the documents belonged to the people Republicans have suspected of removing the records from Vince

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Foster's office the night of his death. Since the suspicions have been a key element in Whitewater conspiracy theories, it does seem the *Times* might have found the absence of the fingerprints more noteworthy....

"Federal unions managed to knock out a controversial proposal that would have let agency managers temporarily dock as much as 25 percent of the pay of poor performers," reports *The Washington Post*'s Mike Causey. This is the latest in a long series of examples of how the civil service unions oppose any attempt to do something about government employees who aren't doing a good job....

In the District of Columbia, the police district with the highest percentage of poor residents and of violent crimes had fewer police officers available for duty during May than the district with the lowest number of violent crimes. With only 194 officers on the job, District 7 had 1,192 violent crimes during the month. By contrast, the more affluent District 3 had 213 officers on duty and only 795 violent crimes. In this case, however, the preference for the affluent was not the act of higher authority, but of the cops themselves. More were assigned to District 7 than to other districts. They just used sick leave and other excuses to avoid coming to work. Maybe they prefer seeing criminals on TV....

In our June issue, we discussed the problem of policemen who work too many hours without a break. We have since learned that there is a similar problem with firemen. One in Los Angeles was on duty for twelve 24-hour shifts in a row. It seems unlikely that he was at peak alertness for the entire time. There are two motives for such long stretches of duty in Los Angeles. One is to get long stretches of days off. The other is to get overtime. One Los Angeles firefighter earned $102,945 in overtime last year. His total compensation was $161,000, more than this country pays the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Ten Los Angeles firefighters earned more than $115,000 in regular pay plus overtime....

One West Virginia judge does not believe in the subtle approach to soliciting campaign contributions. According to the sworn affidavit of a lawyer with Steptoe and Johnson, the judge pulled him aside while he was defending a client in the judge's court and "stated that he was going to review the list of contributors. He informed me that while he would not do anything illegal with respect to any decisions he would make while on the bench, he would remember who supported him and who did not support him."...

One of the joys of my life as a student in New York in the late '40s and early '50s was the neighborhood delicatessen. Hot pastrami sandwiches and giant pickles were delights that were unobtainable in my home state of West Virginia. So I am distressed to learn of the decline of a great institution. From a high of 300 authentic kosher delicatessens in the city, according to a story not long ago in *The New York Times*, the number has dwindled to 35. Not only do younger Jews "prefer more cosmopolitan foods with less cholesterol," the Jewish population in the city has shrunk from 2.1 million in 1950 to 1 million today. Maybe they need more hungry college kids from West Virginia....

Tim Weiner of *The New York Times* recently wrote a story about how the CIA is recruiting on college campuses. To me, the more important news is how few other government agencies are making any attempt to recruit outstanding college graduates. How can you reinvent government without renewing its personnel?...

In addition to the administration's failure to try to attract talented new employees to the federal government, I have another worry about the reinventing government program. It is summarized by a statement Donald Kettl, a professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin, made to *The Wall Street Journal*: "They are trying to get people out the door to hit targets. But they haven't made enough effort to keep the right people."

Keeping the right people isn't easy, because when civil servants hear there might be cuts at their agency, it is the youngest and brightest who leave first. The youngest because they know they can be "bumped" by seniors when a reduction-in-force occurs. The brightest because they are the ones who are most confident of their ability to get another job....

State legislatures have been fighting back against the tendency toward excessive cheapskating by HMOs. More than 10 states now require HMOs to pay for at least two days in the hospital for mothers and newborn babies. But one crucial reform has been enacted by only three states. It would prevent HMOs from restricting the information practitioners can give patients about care options. At the same time several states have passed what I regard as a more dubious reform, requiring HMOs to accept any physician who has appropriate credentials and agrees to abide by the terms of the HMO's contract. It seems to me that an HMO should be free to discriminate among doctors in order to hire those of high

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quality, but certainly not to discourage any physician from giving the patient all the information he or she needs to know, even if it means making the patient aware of choices that will be costly to the HMO....

Did you know that, although it is a felony to falsify a tax return, failing to file any return at all is only a misdemeanor? Well, neither did I. But a lot of smart fellows are very aware of this dandy little loophole. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, the IRS has files on 6.5 million individuals and businesses who it knows do not file returns. Yet only 240 were convicted of not filing in 1994, the last year for which figures are available. "The IRS," according to the *Times*, "regards the vast majority of nonfilers as congenital procrastinators or luckless deadbeats, not criminals." But at least 138,717 non-filers were not so luckless in 1994. They each made at least $100,000 that year. Another who cannot be called luckless is a Santa Barbara attorney named Charter Hughes who—you'll love this—specializes in tax law. When the IRS caught him in 1994, he owed $38,727 in back taxes. After pleading guilty he was put on probation and is once again practicing tax law....

If you noted the cause of the fire that led to the ValuJet crash on May 11, you may be interested in how the FAA handles the problem of hazardous materials. Ruth Larson of *The Washington Times* recently obtained an internal FAA memo, prepared before the ValuJet crash, that described "problems" in the FAA's hazardous materials program. One is that the nine different FAA regions have nine different hazardous materials programs. Another is that, unlike the U.S. Customs service, "the FAA does not have the authority to open or inspect packages for the presence of hazardous materials." A third is that there is "little or no coordination between the FAA and other agencies with hazardous materials

duties," such as Customs and the EPA.

A 1992 internal report by the FAA's Office of Civil Aviation Security, also obtained by Larson, quoted one division manager as saying, "A lot of us think we're going to have a Pan Am 103" with hazardous materials. Another, when asked what the hazardous material program's greatest strength was, replied, "Luck. We have been very lucky nothing has happened."

But Lynne A. Osmus, director of civil aviation security in 1992, is accused of dismissing safety concerns: "I don't want to hear any more statements about airplanes falling out of the sky from you guys."...

I'm indebted to David Broder for this revealing account of the Clinton administration's approach to deficit cutting: The Veterans Administration budget for this politically important year is $1 billion higher than it was last year. But next year—after the election—it will be cut by $3 billion and reduced more thereafter. Sen. Christopher Bond asked Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jesse Brown how he could meet his obligations to veterans with these cuts.

"Senator Bond, we cannot," replied Brown. "The President understands that. I talked with him personally and he gave me his personal commitment that he was going to make sure that the nation honors its commitments to veterans, and that he will negotiate the budget each and every year."

Sen. Bond: "So you are saying that these out-years mean nothing. It is all going to be negotiated in the future.... You are not planning to live with that budget?"

Brown: "I am not planning to live with it."...

We have remarked on the tendency of news stories to mix opinion in with the facts, and, increasingly, to do so before they've told you all the facts. Now comes the new champion of this trend. It's a story from *Time* magazine's daily Internet service. It puts the opinion *before* any fact: "Trying to mend fences with veterans groups, President Clinton extended Vietnam War veterans benefits to cover prostate cancer and nervous disorders caused by Agent Orange."...

My apologies to my old friend, David Burnham, whose name somehow appeared as Burnbaum in this column in our last issue. I have

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learned, by the way, of new evidence—and a new explanation—to support the case Burnham makes in his new book that the enforcement of federal law varies from state to state. According to a recently published paper by professors William J. Hunter and Michael A. Nelson, one factor in federal tax law enforcement in different states is whether the state in question has a member of Congress on one of the committees that oversee the Internal Revenue Service. For example, during the period that Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson served on the Senate Finance Committee, which had jurisdiction over the IRS, the state's audit rate was 24 percent lower than normal. It would seem the IRS does not want to anger constituents of a senator who could give it a hard time....

The bad guys at the CIA did not mourn the death of William Colby, because he was too straight an arrow for them. But that very quality had a lot to do with his being mourned by another group, the Hmong tribesmen of Laos. The Hmong had been the most loyal to the United States of all the people of Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War, rescuing downed American pilots and fighting the North Vietnamese. After the war, much of American officialdom forgot about these friends, many of whom languished in refugee camps. But Colby remained loyal to the Hmong and was a leader in the effort to find new homes for them in the U.S.

Now another forgotten group has surfaced: the dozens of Vietnamese commandos we sent to carry out covert operations in North Vietnam and who we forgot about after they were captured. Now they are forced to sue for back pay. They are not asking for a fortune—just $2,000 a year per person in back pay for time spent in prison, without interest. Government lawyers are fighting the suit on the basis of an 1875 Supreme Court decision that denied back pay to the estate of a Union spy. This is outrageous. These guys risked their lives for us. They were imprisoned because of us. Their demands are absurdly modest. As we go to press, we are hearing reports that President Clinton has decided that the government should stop quibbling and pay up. We hope the reports are correct....

When the Rev. Staccato Powell was questioned about the sincerity of Mayor Marion Barry's recent quest for religious renewal, he replied, according to *The Washington Post*'s Debbi Wilgoren, "The [Holy] Spirit informed me that this was not a con. This was real."...

Another clergyman described by Mayor Barry as "an associate of mine," the Rev. Roweshea L. Burruss, has recently come to the public's attention because a U.S. Secret Service task force executed a search at his District of Columbia home. The home, the scene of numerous large parties according to neighbors, has been described by police as an illegal night club. Mayor Barry, according to *The Washington Post*, says that he goes to Burruss's home to share an occasional meal and "to change his clothes."

It would appear that the Burruss residence is an unusual dwelling place. According to police, it has a stage, a dancing area, a sound system, video games, and a kitchen large enough to prepare food for 200. And Burruss does seem to be a tad unusual himself. "A slender man with a fondness for large pieces of gold jewelry," according to the *Post*, Burruss "likes to make an entrance. He once wore snakeskin boots and a leather coat and had tucked a gun in his waistband when he went to a closing on a house loan he later defaulted on." His own mother once alleged that he had forced her to sign loan papers on her home and church—she was also a minister—so he could, in the words of the *Post*, "pay off a large debt and stay out of jail."

The Rev. Burruss has what the *Post* describes as "a live-in girlfriend, a D.C. police officer." The officer, according to *The Washington Times*, and Burruss "are being investigated in connection with a scheme that may involve more than $200,000 in bad checks."...

Speaking of the D.C. police, they recently arrested two men who they believed, according to the *Post*, had "kidnapped and raped a 17-year-old girl, smoked illegal drugs, carjacked a street vendor's Volvo, pointed a .38 caliber gun at an officer and set fire to three cars."

It now appears that the two men will be set free. Why? I again quote the *Post*:

"According to the court documents, police officers did not interview key witnesses. Blood and secretion samples were not collected from the victim of the alleged rape, and a condom still being worn by one of the accused when he arrived at the hospital was not taken as evidence."

If Bill Clinton and all the Republicans who say they want to fight crime are really serious, they will do something about the leading cause of our failure to arrest and convict criminals—police incompetence. A couple of months ago, I wrote about all those Los Angeles cops who couldn't even shoot straight. They appeared again recently in a long *Wall Street Journal* article about the many and varied inefficiencies of the LAPD.

One of these inefficiencies, you

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will be amused to learn, is that every four weeks "patrol cops spend about three hours each in the station—a combined equivalent of 51 full-time cops—deciding and requesting, in writing, their desired days off."...

We're always happy to find an ally. And all the better when it's a publication as highly esteemed as *The Economist*. The subject is criminal law and what its primary purpose should be. In its June 8 issue, *The Economist* notes that, "As somebody once put it, a criminal in jail cannot rape your sister," and continues, "Protecting society is a better reason to deny somebody his liberty than the prospect of deterrence, rehabilitation, or, for that matter, retribution."

This kind of analysis helps *The Economist*, as it has helped the *Monthly*, see how to avoid the overcrowded prisons that result from the current undiscriminating drive to get tough on crime. "Three strikes" laws, for example, should focus on violent criminals who would be a threat to the public if released.

For nonviolent crimes, *The Economist* urges "fines, confiscation of property, electronic tagging, community service." And so do we. I would add, however, that although long imprisonment makes no sense for the nonviolent, short jail sentences can be a deterrent for many white-collar criminals, especially if they know the time will have to be served, not at some country club, but at the same place where the violent are kept. The prospect of even 30 days with the real bad guys would, I suspect, cause many of the nonviolent to make better moral choices....

Speaking of nonviolent crime, one of its main forms used to be gambling. In most states, of course, gambling is no longer a crime. And that may make sense. Efforts to enforce anti-gambling laws often seemed more successful at breeding corruption than in discouraging bettors. But decriminalizing an activity is not the same as encouraging it, as many states are doing by making placing a bet as convenient as going to your neighborhood store and by advertising state sponsored lotteries. Not only are many states encouraging the public to gamble, as Joshua Wolf Shenk pointed out in these pages last year, they are lying in the process by exaggerating the possibilities of winning.

I hope Congress will authorize the national gaming commission that is being urged by, among others, Sen. Paul Simon and columnists Bill Safire and Frank Rich. And I hope the commission will be tough enough to wake the country up to what has been going on with state lotteries. The reason the states have these lotteries and lie to the public about them is because too many people don't want to pay their fair share of taxes to support needed public services.

This is why Republicans are in such a tough bind on gambling. They love avoiding taxes, but their supporters in the Christian Right take a dim view of gambling. And, of course, there's the matter of campaign contributions from the Las Vegas crowd and their allies. The Democrats get enough to compromise themselves, but the Republicans are getting even more.

There is one simple distinction that can help in dealing with gambling. It is that we may have been wrong to have the government try to forbid something that is part of human nature. But we were clearly wrong to then let government get into the business of encouraging something that bankrupts many of its victims and brings ruin on their families....

Montgomery County, Md., which is home to many of the Washington area's most affluent families, does have some poor people in its midst. But this rich county has cut back its Head Start program, one of the few programs that help the disadvantaged. One Board of Education member told *The Washington Post*, "I don't know why people don't like poor people anymore, but they don't seem to." This has to be one of the saddest facts of contemporary life....

I continue to believe that the President and his wife did no serious wrong in connection with Whitewater. But Hillary Clinton's persistent evasiveness makes it harder and harder to keep the faith. The latest example of how she replies without responding came when she was asked to tell the Whitewater committee everything she knew about how the billing records came to be placed in the book room and who had custody of them during the period after they were subpoenaed in early 1994. Here's how she answered: "I do not know how the billing records came to be identified by Mrs. Huber at the White House on Jan. 4, 1996, although I have read various media accounts."...

But if you need a reason to endure the First Lady's lawyerliness for another four years, ponder this remark by Senator John McCain about Bob Dole: "The reason Dole likes to have me around, I think, is that I never offer him advice. I never open my mouth unless he asks." For a president to give such an impression to his aides could be disastrous. It is essential that he encourage those around him to speak up. Otherwise there is too much bad news—or too many good ideas—that he won't hear, either until it's too late or not at all....

—*Charles Peters*

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Government's Nine-to-Fivers

For secretaries in the federal government, there's no reward for good performance, no penalty for bad, and increasingly, not much to do

BY AMY WALDMAN

For a portal to the future, the setting is ruthlessly devoid of glamour: a large, off-white room, harsh neon lights, a buzzing noise of undetermined origin, rows of small, battered desks. In the examining room at the federal government's Office of Personnel Management (OPM), early on a Wednesday morning, some 130 people have come to take the clerical positions exam, a prerequisite for entry-level jobs with the federal government.

A majority of the aspiring clerical workers are female; many are black; most are young. For over an hour, they fill in their name, education, and work experience as a proctor drones instructions from the front of the room. When it comes time to select their first-choice job, a horizon of possibilities opens before them: telephone operator ... communications clerk ... arts and information clerk ... secretary. "Choose what interests you," the proctor says encouragingly, as if the world lies at their fingertips. "Choose what you think you would like to do."

For decades, employment with the federal government has offered entrée not just to the power-seeking elite, but also—through hundreds of thousands of entry-level clerical positions—to people with more limited opportunities. For women with few career options, government clerical jobs historically provided a back door into administrative positions and, ultimately, management. The federal government also preceded the private sector in offering blacks open employment and at least some chance for advancement—the black middle class, especially in Washington, D.C., was built largely through government jobs. In the District, preparation for the civil service exam was a regular part of high school curricula. Most high school graduates in the area had good shots at landing entry-level positions in the government, and many did.

Even as more Americans began attending college, government still offered white-collar jobs with decent pay, good benefits, and job security to those with only a high school diploma. Jantrice Chappell had a child her senior year at McKinley Technical High School in Washington, D.C.; she was 17. But through the government's Stay-in-School program, she got a job in the Justice Department upon graduation. Today, she has three secretaries under her at the Department of Agriculture.

If Chappell graduated today, however, she might well face a very different situation—a low-paying service-sector job, possibly even unemployment or

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welfare. For the job titles enumerated on the clerical positions exam are now more tease than truth. Over half the people in the room will pass the test, but most will not get any job at all, let alone the one that sounds most alluring. Currently, 3,200 people who have passed the test are awaiting clerical jobs in the D.C. area. The list grows weekly.

Government hiring nationwide has dropped precipitously, but nowhere has the drop been as dramatic as in the clerical category. In 1984, clerical positions represented more than 25 percent of all government jobs; by 1994, they had dropped to just under 16 percent. In 1990, 5,943 new clerical workers were hired from the D.C. area—last year only 1,204 were. "I can't remember the last time we hired a clerical person," says Joyce Felder, a human resources official at the Veterans Administration. The State Department had 800 applications for the last clerical position it posted.

At its highest levels, the federal government is ruminating over policies to deal with the "forgotten half"—Americans who have only a high school education and lack the necessary skills to prosper in an information- and technology-based economy. At its lowest ranks, the government is a living microcosm of that plight. Across the country, doors are closing in the faces of those who lack higher education. With the elimination of entry-level clerical jobs, they're closing in government too.

But there are plenty of clerical workers already through the door. In the private sector, many would likely be laid off, much like factory workers replaced by machines. But in the executive branch, civil service protections make mass layoffs next to impossible; barring attrition, this means the government must work with what it has and determine how to make workers with obsolete skills productive in a transformed workplace.

Unfortunately, the way the government manages human resources ties its own hands. The American ideal is that if you work hard, you get ahead; if you don't, you pay the price. But American government runs directly counter to that concept: Outdated personnel structures make it difficult to reward people who work hard, acquire new skills, and take on new tasks. And entrenched civil service protections, and the vociferous unions that enforce them, mean there's little penalty for those who don't make an effort to catch up and contribute. Thousands of civil servants are indifferent to the government's performance because it seems so indifferent to theirs.

Nowhere is this problem more evident, and more complained about, than among the federal government's secretaries—the women who keep the offices running (there are only 400 male secretaries out of some 20,000 in the D.C.-area federal government), and often serve as the buffer between government and the public. Secretaries have always had less at stake in the system than most civil servants. Now, much of their work has been made redundant by automation. In response, too many managers have adopted a philosophy of "benign neglect"—preferring to let a secretary do nothing than to figure out how to make her constructive. The result is unproductive employees at a time when government can scarcely afford them, and festering resentment by secretaries already chafing against their second-class status.

Blind to Ambition

Delores Ham and her boss celebrated over lunch the first time she typed a letter for the Secretary of Labor to sign. It was the mid-1960s. Ham was a young high school graduate, who, like thousands of other young women in the District, had gone to work for the federal government as a secretary. It was one of the best opportunities open to a young black woman; but more than that, it was exciting. "There was so much to do, to learn," Ham says. "It was *awesome*, honey!"

The lunch was recognition of a job—an important job—well done. Secretaries' role in the department's functioning was crucial: Every letter, brief, or report demanded intensive manual labor, particularly in dictation and typing. Making copies required loading carbons into the electric typewriter, and striking the keys hard enough to make sure the letters pressed onto the carbons. A mistake had to be scratched off with a razor blade—on both the original and multiple copies—and then typed over. A missed letter, or editorial changes, meant retyping the entire page, sometimes 10 or more times. Everything was done by hand—secretaries' hands.

Thirty-two years later, Ham is still a secretary, still at the Labor Department, but she is decidedly less central to the government's workings. The day I interviewed her, she arrived at work at 2:30 p.m.

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and went straight to a union meeting for the rest of the day. The department did not come toppling down. In fact, no one seemed to notice.

During Ham's tenure in government, the world shifted beneath her feet, and she did not shift with it. Copying by carbon, stenography, typing—all have given way to Xerox machines and faxes and a computer on every desk. That means professionals can draft letters and reports themselves and print multiple copies with the press of a button. Voice mail, phone menus, and e-mail lighten the load of telephone work. Budgets are done electronically. The skills Ham once took pride in, such as stenography, haven't been used in years. And at 55—retirement age if she so chooses—she has little interest in acquiring new ones. So she occupies a desk, collects a paycheck, does some menial work, and devotes most of her energy to union tasks. "There's a lot of time that you don't have particularly anything to do," she says.

As technology has transformed government offices, one of two things has happened to secretarial jobs: They either have come to require higher-level skills—not just technological, but managerial as well; or they have become "de-skilled"—reduced to the most menial of tasks. That's what happened to Delores Ham, and many others. For them, in a job where the struggle for self-worth has always been uphill, the well of dignity is running dry.

"Charlene" is a receptionist at a federal government District field office. She answers phones and greets messengers and constituents. She is dressed to the nines: red blazer and costume jewelry, bright make-up, and stylishly close-cropped hair. But there is an oppressive sadness about her. After 12 years in government, she earns only $21,705, a pittance for a 38-year-old single mother of two. "I need more money," Charlene says. "I'm strug-

Race, Class, and Clerical Work

Architecturally speaking, the dingy hallways of government could not be less interesting. Sociologically, they could not be more so. Professionals and managers have offices of their own—and almost all the people disappearing into and emerging from those offices are white. Secretaries have open-air work stations and cubicles. And the faces you see in those exposed areas are not only exclusively female, but predominantly black.

The transformation of secretaries' professional lives is taking place against a crucial demographic backdrop. Of the 2,043,449 employees in the executive branch as of 1994, 44 percent were women; 17 percent were black. The federal government, particularly in the District, has embodied one of the larger experiments in institutional integration in American history. Blacks and whites, lawyers and secretaries, may live separately; they may school their children separately; but in the federal government, to a greater extent than in the private sector, they work together.

But the aggregate numbers don't illuminate the whole picture—namely, how women and blacks, who represent more than half the secretaries in the D.C. federal government, remain clustered in the lower ranks. "The pattern hasn't changed since I came," says Delores Ham, a secretary marking her 33rd year in government. "There's a certain sector at the bottom, and a certain sector at the top." That fact has become an unspoken factor in downsizing calculations: So much of the government's racial diversity is in its lower ranks that severe reductions in those ranks would throw off a hard-won demographic balance. One Census Bureau manager says that they no longer have use for the workers who used to maintain the Bureau's now-obsolete mainframe computers; almost all of the workers are black. "Theoretically, we would declare all these people surplus and have a reduction-in-force," the manager says. "We might if it were a diverse group. But having it concentrated in largely African Americans ... it ties our hands a little."

The vertical segregation by race and gender has a class corollary. Whereas the upper ranks of government are populated with ambitious migrants who come to D.C. with B.A.s, M.A.s, J.D.s, and Ph.D.s, the lower ranks are filled with the D.C. born-and-bred, many with only high school diplomas. A secretary will struggle to get to a GS-7 pay rating, but a 26-year-old lawyer may sail in as a GS-14. Those educational and economic disparities will grow as the government increasingly attempts to lure high-skill specialists.

To an extent, government in Washington offers a portrait of the relations among races and classes, and these days, those relations are strained. Managers and secretaries both speak quietly about the culture gap between them, of how little they have in common. There is little real mixing. Secretaries lunch with secretaries; professionals with professionals. Says Aleta Hicks, a Justice Department secretary, explaining why she would never socialize, even at work, with the professionals in her office, "You don't associate with common criminals if you're not one. You hang out with people you have something in common with."

Secretaries say they feel looked down on, and talked down to, by professionals ("so-called profes-

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gling."

But her prospects for advancement are minimal, because, by all accounts, she has no other skills than the ones she is using. "They don't give me anything to do," she says, "not even typing." But a co-worker confides, "I don't think she can type." A computer, switched off, rests stone-cold and silent on her desk. So there she will sit, doing nothing, earning little, until she "gets the age"—retirement age, 55. She wants more, but seems to have neither the means nor the moxie to get it.

Even support staff with more hustle and skill than Charlene can find themselves stymied by a lack of opportunity. LaNedra Wright is a 28-year-old secretary in the Department of Agriculture. Eight years ago, she left college and took a job in government to help support her mother. Her intelligence shines from a full face framed by short, springy dreadlocks. She is bright, motivated, and a good worker. She is taking night classes in computer and information science. She is not held back by a dearth of education or training or brains; she just needs a chance.

Instead, her workday is eight hours of idleness. She answers the phone, does some filing now and then, and picks up the occasional package. Wright set up an efficient filing system; the result, for better or worse, is that "the office basically runs itself," leaving her even less to do. Professionals bustle in and out to fax, Xerox, check mail, and collect messages, but otherwise she works alone in a perfectly organized office, eerily silent except for the occasional ringing telephone and the soft drone of an air conditioner. The air may be cool, but the boredom is stifling. "I have so much more to offer," she says. "I need some food for my brain."

Wright asked to be detailed to a computer division. Her supervisors said no. Tributes to her

sionals," one secretary sniffs. "I'm a professional too.") who take their privileges—earned or inherited—for granted. Hicks says of the attorneys in her office: "They grew up with a silver spoon. The money was there, and they just had to decide what they wanted to do." Many men who have been in government for 30 years also have trouble accepting that women have brains, or that secretaries do. "I've been here for over five years," says one secretary. "I'll say something technical, and [my supervisor] looks at me like I'm from Mars—like, 'Who is she to know this?'"

Racial tension often stays below the surface, but it's there nonetheless. One black secretary says that just before the Million Man March, a white manager said to her, "The thought of a million black men marching has a lot of honkies scared." She was, understandably, infuriated. And because the bulk of their supervisors are white, blacks see racism in every reproach. "Minorities do the least little thing wrong and are called to account," Delores Ham says. "Blacks have to prove themselves," agrees Hicks.

Managers, meanwhile, complain that their black secretaries answer the phone rudely, don't smile, and don't look them in the eye. "Because someone doesn't smile, that's not necessarily negative," Hicks, who is black, replies. "You need to accept me for my background, my culture, my thinking." It's easier to talk about cultural differences than racial differences, but Hicks makes clear what she's referring to.

Whites also complain that black secretaries will do more for black supervisors or managers, apparently out of some sense of racial solidarity. But in truth, it may also come from the fact that black supervisors seem to *demand* more. Many managers I spoke with complained about their secretaries' lack of work ethic; only one said that she absolutely will not tolerate unscheduled leave or any other unprofessional behavior. She is black. The rest countenance the behavior, then privately gripe. White managers' reluctance to demand of their black employees the standards of performance they would expect of white peers demonstrates a possibly well-intentioned, but ultimately condescending racial sensitivity that benefits neither the worker nor the manager.

Of course, in the reluctance of whites to demand performance from blacks, there's also some fear of being labeled a racist. Unions relish wielding the race issue. One union newsletter, attacking the Bureau of Labor Statistics for firing a black woman, says, "The alleged basis for the termination is performance. The Union believes [the employee] was fired because of race. BLS has a long-time reputation for different treatment for those of African descent." The only evidence they cite is a secondhand comment about racism at BLS from someone who worked there 15 years ago.

Minorities *are* fired at nearly two-and-a-half times the rate of nonminorities, a government study found last year. At the same time, the report notes that minorities were absent without leave more often, which suggests that all the firings weren't necessarily unfounded. Obviously, a complex mix of factors is at work, but unions seem less interested in finding the truth than playing the race card to protect employees.

The tension between blacks and whites and professional and clerical classes isn't helped by the threat of downsizing, either. "There's fear," says Ham. "Folks at the bottom hold it against folks at the top. And folks at the top take it out on those at the bottom." —*A.W.*

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competence—Secretaries' Day cards and balloons—hang on her wall, but Wright bristles. "I get tired of, 'You're doing a wonderful job.' If you think so, give me more money, more opportunity." Unless some more meaningful work opens up, Wright says she will leave the government when she obtains her college degree.

Though she works as a secretary just a few floors up from Wright in the Agriculture Department, Jantrice Chappell's work life could not be more different. Her day is a blizzard of activity: keeping her director's schedule; responding to e-mail requests; updating allocations for travel spending; monitoring promotions; compiling time, attendance, and personnel records for 40 employees; supervising three secretaries; and preparing and locating policy documents. She types, proofreads, answers phones, and responds to requests from Congress. "Sometimes we're so busy we don't eat lunch," she says, "but I enjoy it. I don't want to be bored. If there's nothing to do, you're not going to learn very much."

"I have so much to offer," one secretary says. "I need some food for my brain."

Chappell lucked out: Unlike Wright, she is in an office that has figured out how to make good use of her. But Chappell suffers from another kind of missing opportunity: Though more office manager than traditional "secretary," nothing in the system—neither her title, nor her rank, nor her pay, nor her prospects for advancement—recognizes her as such. And the main reason is the government's archaic personnel ranking system—a system that dates back to 1949.

Most government workers are paid under a system called "General Schedule": GS-1 is the lowest rank; 15 is the highest. Supervisors and personnel departments evaluate the duties an employee is expected to perform, and assign a grade accordingly. You move up a grade (or climb one of the 10 steps within each grade) if the knowledge required to do your job increases.

The problem is that the system very much reflects the thinking of the era in which it was designed. Administrators and professionals can climb to the top rung of the career ladder. But most secretaries enter at GS-3 or 4, work their way up to 6 or 7—and find themselves on a plateau, with no possibility of ever going higher. Nationwide, there are only 8,007 secretaries—out of 74,508—at GS-8 or higher.

The OPM classification manual for secretaries was last updated in 1979. Typing and stenography figure heavily, but it makes no reference to modern office equipment. Secretaries are also judged by outdated measures such as the number of people who work for their boss—a measure that does not necessarily reflect the work they do. And, according to the personnel manual, even whether the secretary's boss "is a leading authority in his own field and is a member of many professional societies, holding office in several" can be a factor in grading a secretary.

In other words, a secretary's status can be determined not by what she does, nor by how well she does it—performance isn't taken into account in grading—but by the importance of the person she works for. Some agencies actually mandate that a secretary must be at least seven or eight grades below her boss. A lot of secretaries complain that they're not getting credit for the complexity of the work they do, and they're right: A 1995 General Accounting Office audit of position classifications found that secretaries were underclassified—meaning that their grade did not reflect the complexity of their tasks—48 percent of the time.

Chappell, who is 31, cannot advance much farther as a secretary, and her prospects for getting out of the clerical ranks are equally dim. To get an administrative position, which would put her on a career ladder going up to at least a GS-12, she needs formal administrative (as opposed to clerical) experience. To get such experience, she needs to move into one of the department's "career enhancement" administrative assistant positions.

For a time in the '70s and early '80s, the federal government was rich with opportunities for good secretaries to move into administrative positions. Prompted by the desire to diversify more than just the clerical ranks, numerous "bridging" positions, internships, and "upward mobility" programs allowed blacks and women to get the experience they needed to advance. In many ways, it was the ideal kind of affirmative action program: creating opportunity for those who earned it.

Sharita Shaw, a 28-year-old woman with a dazzling smile, began as a clerk-typist in 1984, following much of her family into government ser-

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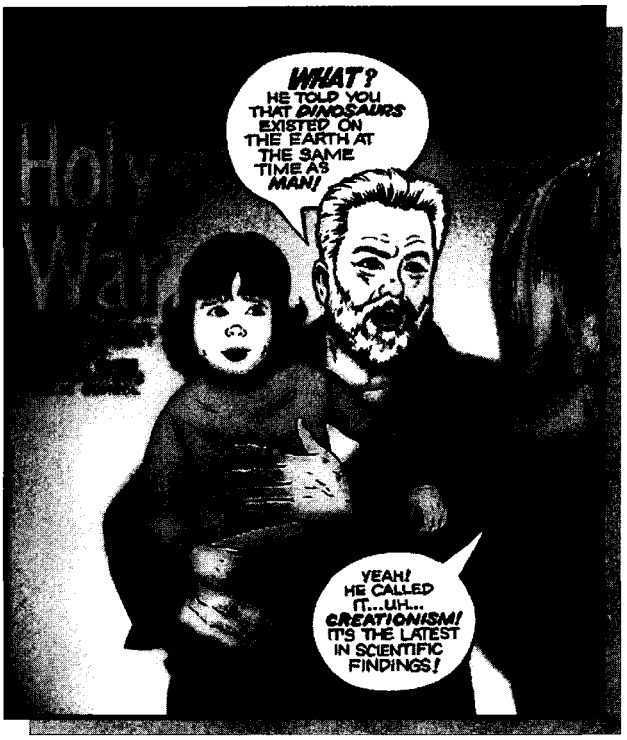

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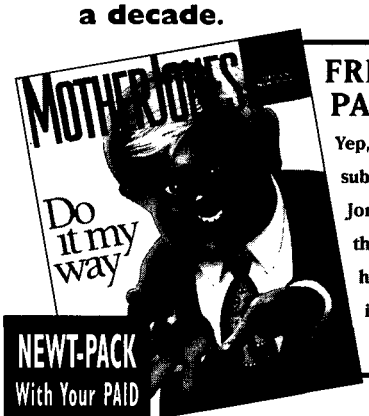

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vice; she is now an information specialist at the Environmental Protection Agency. She moved through a series of secretarial positions, took whatever training was offered, and has now returned to college part-time. "I have always been a person who goes the extra mile to make sure I get noticed," Shaw says, adding with pride, "I have a very good work ethic." And she had mentors who supported her efforts to escape the secretarial field. Another promotion is due next month.

But such opportunities have become few and far between, thanks to a waning commitment to diversity in the '80s and eviscerating budget cuts in the '90s. In the Labor Department, to give a typical example, only 51 secretaries have entered the Career Enhancement Program since 1993. Without such programs, a secretary like Chappell will likely dead end: Even with 20 more years of service, she faces the dispiriting prospect that she will never make more than $32,582 (the maximum GS-7 pay).

In 1987, the Hudson Institute produced a report called Civil Service 2000. It predicted the decline in clerical work, and the government's growing need for more skilled workers. The government would be faced with the choice of "buying" or "making" the workforce it needed—either bringing in people with the necessary skills, or trying to develop the skills of the people it had. For low-paying positions in particular, the report noted, maintaining productivity would require both remedial education and basic skills development.

On the whole, the government has opted to buy rather than make a more skilled workforce. It is hiring higher-skilled technical and professional workers (and in some cases bestowing them with wildly inflated grades to outbid the private sector); meanwhile, it is abandoning low-skilled workers to stagnation. "You're only inclined to [train] someone when you can't get someone from outside with the right qualifications," one personnel officer explains. As agencies implement austerity measures, employee development programs and money for college courses have been the first to go. "It's almost impossible to find resources to pay for training," says one manager in the Census Bureau.

The Clinton administration's exhortations to corporate America to invest in retraining—to invest in people—ring hollow when executive branch agencies are so lackluster in this regard. "Every worker has to be productive; we can't afford to carry dead weight" in light of budget cuts, manager after manager tells me. Yet by cutting the very programs that would engender that productivity, the government makes carrying dead weight unavoidable.

Working the System

"If they would look at an administrative career as a serious career," says one secretary, "it would keep people. There would be less absenteeism. People would be motivated." That many secretaries *aren't* motivated is one of the great problems in government. For just as there are no carrots built into the system for secretaries who go above and beyond the call of duty, there are no sticks for those who underperform. Bad workers are rarely fired, and a variety of factors dissuade managers from even criticizing or disciplining them. New hires quickly learn how the system works, or how to work the system.

Swapping "secretary stories" seems to be something of a sport among government managers and professionals, who try to top each other with the most outlandish excuse for days missed and the amount of time spent on the simplest of tasks. Many secretaries simply do the 9-to-5 (or 8-to-4) minimum, refusing to do anything not explicitly required of them. One Labor Department analyst says she asked her secretary to help her with making travel arrangements. The secretary's response: "Do it yourself." Travel plans weren't in her job description.

The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 was supposed to improve government management. It has not. What President Carter said of the government's personnel management system—that it "neglects merit, tolerates poor performance ... and mires every personnel action in red tape, delay, and confusion"—still holds true. Firing someone requires reams of documentation, compiled over months. Most supervisors suspect that even a successful dismissal will be reversed on appeal; if so, that means dealing with an angry employee on the job. There could be accusations of race, sex, or age discrimination. With all these perceived downsides, keeping a lazy or even downright incompetent worker doesn't seem so bad. "Many supervisors believe they can work around the deficiencies of their poor performers," the Merit Systems Pro-

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tection Board (MSPB) noted last year—and that is exactly what they do. The MSPB found that 78 percent of government supervisors have supervised poorly performing employees at some point in their careers. Less than one fourth took steps to remove or demote the employee. Instead, bad workers get shuffled from one office to another like hot potatoes.

Under existing law, agencies can't take poor performance into account when determining reductions-in-force (RIF); an employee who establishes that poor performance was a factor in a RIF can have it set aside. Employees who want to challenge a proposed performance-related removal can potentially access five different dispute resolution forums, each with multiple review levels—what the MSPB calls a "maze of appellate routes."

Swapping "secretary stories," such as the most outlandish excuse for days missed, is almost a sport in government.

The irony is that these elaborate due process protections were designed to lure the best workers to government. Instead, they have attracted—and retained—the unqualified, the unmotivated, and the uninspired, who in the private sector would be forced to shape up or ship out. A young man I met at the clerical positions exam put it best: "Government's great! Once you pass probation, you don't have to do anything," he said. His sister is a government secretary: "She barely works and they can't touch her."

In truth, all of this has less to do with regulations than with the unions who enforce them to the letter (and beyond). Sandy Bright, a manager in the Criminal Division at the Justice Department, says she recently tried to fire the worst employee she had seen in 30 years of government service: "The union fought me tooth and nail." Aleta Hicks, a legal secretary in the Justice Department and chief steward for the union local, confirms Bright's take: "We don't agree with the firing of any of our employees."

Sometimes, Hicks concedes, there are cases of bad work performance. But then her question becomes, "Were they advised of it, and given the chance to correct? ... Is there a personality problem? Do they need someone to talk to? A support group?" As one manager says, "If an employee isn't performing well, it's always, always, always the manager's fault."

It's not just attempts to fire that arouse union wrath; so can poor—or even average—performance ratings. Rare is the secretary who will concede she did merely satisfactory work. One secretary who was rated that way tells me she "threw a tantrum" with her supervisor—and walked out with an "outstanding" rating. Says one manager in the Commerce Department, "You don't dare give a bad rating. There are a lot of grievances filed these days. ... People only have so much time and energy—they don't want to spend it dealing with grievances or [law]suits." To make matters worse, everything that transpires after a grievance is filed may be read as "retaliation" by the accused manager.

Theoretically, managers have the power to encourage more professional behavior or set higher standards, but they seem to live in terror of irritating their secretaries, especially those likely to file grievances. One encounter I witnessed between a Department of Labor lawyer and a secretary went like this:

Lawyer: "I left an assignment for you to get from the library on your chair because you weren't at your desk."

Secretary: "I was at a meeting."

Lawyer: "Oh no, I just wanted to make sure you saw it. I wasn't checking up on you."

Secretary: "It says right here [on the locator board] that I was at a meeting."

Lawyer: "I spend all day at my desk, I never would think to check up on anyone." By the end, he was virtually prostrate in apology for even giving the impression that he was checking up on her.

Automation has only made things worse. More than a few secretaries have reacted with bitterness—a sort of passive resistance—to their irrelevance. "People show up for work, disappear for long stretches of time, and show up in order to sign out," the Labor Department analyst says. "It's willful, because no one is minding the store." Resentful that their jobs have been dumbed down, and nervous about their future, secretaries rebel against the work—photocopying, answering phones—that's emblematic of their low status. "Nobody minds the grunt work if it's on the road to discovery," Ham says. "But not if you are going to do grunt work for 10 years and then be told, 'We

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don't need you to do grunt work anymore.'"

Given the bad blood, some professionals have simply taken to avoiding their secretaries, even if that means doing their own Xeroxing, typing their own envelopes, even answering their own phones. "It takes a lot of effort to work with someone who might have been neglected ... and who has gotten away with doing very little because nothing was expected," the labor analyst says. Most managers choose instead to ignore secretaries who while away their days on the phone, or disappear into the cafeteria after clocking in, or miss work regularly for doctors' appointments, or car repairs, or no good reason at all.

Raging Against the Machine

Secretarial performance doesn't just suffer from a lack of motivation, though. In some cases, there's a competence problem too. For decades, the government paid better than the private sector, and its secretaries were considered the cream of the crop. But in the late '70s, with the coagulation of trade associations and law firms in the capital, more, and better paying, private sector jobs became available. By the early '80s, the federal government was so desperate for clerical workers that agency recruiters fanned out to high schools, gave the exam, and hired on the spot. Some agencies even pressed to have the written test waived. And the government stopped giving typing tests for clerical applicants, instead allowing them to "self-certify."

The result was an influx of low-skill workers, just a few years before computers began to change the workplace. Many of these workers came from declining public schools, especially in the District; they lacked not only technological skills, but sometimes basic literacy as well. P.J. Winzer, who heads the Washington, D.C. Regional Office of the Merit Systems Protection Board, says, "I have encountered a problem with basic skills.... Something is missing in their being prepared as they come out of high school." Once, halfway through a job interview with a District high school graduate, Winzer realized that the young woman couldn't read. One personnel manager says managers in her agency became so resistant to hiring District graduates that she was pressured to travel to Texas, which had a depressed economy at the time, to recruit clerical help.

Even after the workplace began automating and it became clear that higher-skilled workers were needed, the government still did not change its screening process. In fact, it still hasn't changed it. The clerical positions exam hasn't been revised in over a decade, and it shows. The skills it tests for—alphabetizing, picking out misspelled names, basic math—do little to get at the higher-level tasks agencies now want secretaries to perform.

It was the mediocrity of the clerical pool hired in the early '80s that prompted many government managers to embrace automation enthusiastically in the first place. "You see less and less complaining about [clerical] people not having the oral or verbal skills to perform secretarial functions," says Henry Romero, the director of personnel at the Justice Department. "Technology has created a detour around that situation." One personnel officer speaks excitedly about the possibilities of "machine to machine" operations, which would eliminate the need for clerical workers entirely. Some departments have discovered another detour: bringing in temporary contract workers to do basic clerical functions like answering phones. If they don't perform, or there's no longer need for them, the government can just send them back.

The unions are fighting fires on every front: threatened RIFs, contracting out—and automation itself. In a step Ned Ludd would have appreciated, some secretaries and union locals have actually filed grievances against the introduction of new technology. But halting technology's advance will only postpone the inevitable and hamper government's efficiency. Government employment can't continue to be a welfare program, especially when government itself is so under siege. Federal managers need to be able to get rid of people who aren't contributing. And by continuing to protect every individual worker, deserving or not, unions are undermining the collective interests of the government's forgotten half.

The unions are right, however, that it is unfair to consign those marooned by history—whether because of miserable schools or computers' arrival—to uselessness, and perhaps unemployment. For employees willing to retool themselves into productive workers, government ought to provide both remedial education and advanced training. Workers with drive and ability should be rewarded with opportunity. Government needs to weed out those who want to be carried, but it ought to hold a hand out to those who want to walk the distance. □

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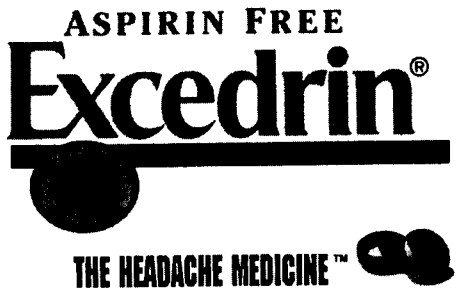
Tidbits & Outrages

TAKE TWO AND CALL ME IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

The Bristol-Myers Squibb Co. is recalling a batch of its Excedrin pain reliever after filling Excedrin bottles with the caffeine stimulant NoDoz, another of its products.



ONE GOOD TORT DESERVES ANOTHER

A personal injury trial in Detroit was declared a mistrial after the plaintiff's attorney pulled the defense attorney's hair.

TAKING STATES' RIGHTS TO NEW HEIGHTS

The FAA is fining Ohio Governor George Voinovich $1,500 for taking off from a Columbus airport that had been closed down because President Clinton was in the area. "I'm going to tell them to go screw themselves, OK," he said into the cockpit microphone before takeoff. "If they don't like it—fine. They can shoot us down."

YANKEE VALUES

A couple in Lawrence, Mass., were charged with animal cruelty for leaving their dog locked in their car in 90 degree heat. Their children were also in the car, but there is no law against that in the state of Massachusetts.

DAMNED IF YOU DO, DAMNED IF YOU DON'T

A construction worker in North Carolina's Outer Banks cut off his hand in 1994 because he thought it was possessed by the devil, then refused to allow doctors to reattach it, insisting it would mean eternal damnation if they did. The one-handed man is now suing the doctors and hospital for malpractice, claiming they should have known he was mentally ill.

SHOWS YOU HOW OFTEN THE D.O.E. CLEANS ITS BATHROOMS

Three brand-new laser printers were found locked in a bathroom stall at a Department of Energy field site. The government-owned printers, valued at $6,400, had been missing for almost two years.

EDITERS WONTED

More Self-Employed Wrokers Are Turning to Desktop Publishing

from the Los Angeles Times

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The Right Questions

What the candidates should be asked

BY MORTON MINTZ

In November 1942, Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles learned authoritatively from the U.S. legation in Switzerland that Hitler had ordered the extermination of all Jews in Nazi-controlled Europe. Welles confided this information to Dr. Stephen Wise, the country's foremost Jewish leader, who in turn called a press conference in Washington. The horrifying news was widely reported, even if it was not a major story in any of 19 leading newspapers.

But, as David Wyman revealed in *The Abandonment of the Jews*, it apparently didn't occur to any White House correspondent to put a perfectly professional question like this one to Franklin D. Roosevelt: "Mr. President, Rabbi Wise says the government knows authoritatively that the Nazis intend to exterminate the Jews in the occupied countries. Is this true, and if it is, what will you do about it?" FDR normally held press conferences twice a week—an extraordinary frequency. Had he been forced to grapple publicly with such a question, many innocent lives could have been saved. After all, it was pressure from within his own administration that led him belatedly to create the War Refugee Board, which saved hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives. Instead, Wyman writes, "The first clear comment [from FDR] on the mass killing of Jews came on March 24, 1944." That was 16 months after Wise's press conference.

Notwithstanding their defects—growing concentration, shrinking staffs, celebrity mania, loony news judgments and the rest—publications and airwaves are filled with facts that could give rise to all manner of tough, essential questions for present and would-be officeholders. Particularly in the television age, merely posing a question can enlighten viewers. But reporters ask such questions all too rarely. President Bush, for example, was never asked if deregulation had contributed to the savings and loan debacle, even though Vice President Bush had led the President's Task Force on Deregulation for eight years. In May 1988, the surgeon general announced that cigarettes "are addicting in the same sense as are drugs such as heroin and cocaine." But neither then nor after the nomi-

Morton Mintz was a Washington Post *reporter for nearly 30 years. He is a former chair of the* Fund for Investigative Journalism.

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nating conventions were the presidential candidates asked if they agreed with the report, and if they did, how they would justify taking campaign money from tobacco interests.

The 1996 election campaigns offer reporters priceless opportunities—in interviews, briefings, and press conferences—to serve the public by exploring a wide range of issues that matter greatly but are ignored nonetheless. To help ensure that these opportunities will not be squandered, here is a sampling of the kinds of questions, accompanied where necessary by brief summaries of the facts they spring from, that should be put to presidential, Senate, and House candidates.

For All Candidates

The principal rationale for continuing Cold War military budgets is that we must be able to fight two major regional wars at the same time. The Pentagon wants to spend $1 trillion for a new generation of jet fighters—about $10,000 for every household in America—although we already have the world's best.

Q. What is the threat that justifies continuing military spending at Cold War levels?

Q. On what basis do you accept or reject the two-wars-at-once rationale?

Q. How will the country be better served by spending the equivalent of six times the budget deficit on jet fighters, or $30 billion on B-2 bombers the Joint Chiefs of Staff say they do not need, rather than spending that money on, say, health care, infrastructure, or education?

The common law defines bribery as "a receipt of anything of value where the intent is to influence" someone "in his official capacity."

Q. Is it bribery to make campaign "contributions" intended to abort, procure, or defeat legislation?

Q. Does the existing system of campaign finance nourish bribery?

Q. Does the system favor the wealthy over the poor?

Last year, the two biggest contributors of "soft money" to the Republican and Democratic party committees were the cigarette companies Philip Morris and RJR Nabisco. Together, they invested more than $2 million. In the past 10 years, tobacco PACs invested nearly $10 million in congressional races. Meanwhile, tobacco-related diseases are the largest single cause of preventable death in America.

Q. Would you, or why do you, take money from the producers of these products?

Q. Given that our excise taxes on tobacco are the lowest imposed by any of 13 industrialized countries, and that experts predict a tax increase of $2 a pack would avoid 1.9 million premature deaths, do you favor or oppose increasing the federal excise tax on cigarettes?

The Congressional Budget Office says that Congress could cut federal spending sharply by denying the mortgage interest deduction to the wealthiest Americans. Limiting the deduction to loans of no more than $300,000 would save $34.8 billion in just five years.

Q. Should middle-class home-owners and renters who can't afford to buy a house in the first place continue to subsidize mortgage interest deductions for buyers of the most expensive homes?

Q. Will you seek to cap the mortgage interest deduction?

Social Security payments totaling $15 billion annually go to households with retirement incomes exceeding $100,000, while payments totaling $60 billion go to households with retirement incomes of more than $50,000.

Q. Should Congress cap Social Security payments to households with high retirement incomes?

Even though most families had begun to rely on an additional wage earner, the period from 1979 to 1994 saw the annual household income of the poorest fifth of Americans decline 3 percent, to $7,800. Income for the next fifth de-

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clined 4 percent, to $19,200; in the middle fifth, the decline was 2 percent, to $32,400. Yet, because wealthier Americans saw their incomes increase, total household income grew by $1.1 trillion.

Q. Would you do anything to reverse this trend? What?

The corporate tax rate was 31 percent during the prosperous 1950s and is now 15 percent. Returning the corporate tax rate to 31 percent could increase annual revenues from that source by 250 percent.

Q. Do you favor or oppose such an increase in the corporate tax rate?

The pay gap between CEOs and workers has grown wider in the United States than in any other industrial democracy.

Q. Do you favor or oppose a limit on the corporate tax deduction for executive compensation in excess of, say, $3 million a year?

United Nations agencies estimate that the U.N. sanctions on Iraq have caused more than 500,000 Iraqi children to die of hunger and disease, a number exceeding the combined toll taken by the atomic bombs dropped on Japan and ethnic cleansing in the old Yugoslavia.

Q. Should the United States seek the lifting of sanctions?

For Presidential Candidates

A former head of the White House Correspondents Association proposed that the president hold weekly press conferences. The first conference in each month would be televised, the third would be open to the press at large, and the second and fourth would be informal, stand-up sessions in the Oval Office.

Q. Would you favor or oppose such a system?

Q. Would you favor or oppose a system in which questions were drawn by lottery, rather than by you selecting the questioner?

For President Clinton

In 1975, the ruler of Indonesia, General Suharto, ordered his armed forces to invade and occupy East Timor. More than 200,000 out of 690,000 East Timorese died as a result. Your administration continues to sell arms to Indonesia even though the human rights situation in East Timor and Indonesia is worsening, according to the State Department.

Q. Is it moral for us to do this?

Russia's war against Chechnya has cost 30,000 lives. Some 8,000 children have been mutilated by bombs, land mines, and napalm. Pax Christi, a Dutch human rights group, accuses the Russians of "applying terrorist methods against the civilian population."

Q. Why have you remained silent on the war in Chechnya?

In recent years, about half of the Justice Department's budget has been focused on controlling illegal drugs. Yet in numerous studies in recent years, the General Accounting Office has found that the government's 25-year war on drugs has had almost no impact on the availability or price of illegal drugs.

Q. Did you seek any critical analysis of the effectiveness of the Justice Department's war on drugs before calling, in your State of the Union address, for a further escalation of the war?

We still have the most expensive per capita health care of any country, yet between 41 and 44 million Americans have no health insurance.

Q. Will you pursue health care reform in your second term?

The General Accounting Office calculated that a single-payer health care system similar to Canada's would save the American people staggering amounts of money every year—from $74.5 billion in 1992 to $174 billion by the year 2000, principally by lowering administrative expenses. It would also guarantee health care coverage for all Americans. During the battle over health care reform in 1994, polls showed that the public favored single-payer, and both you and the First Lady have acknowledged it to be the superior system.

Q. If you were to pursue health care reform during a second term, would you advocate sin-

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gle-payer or something else?

The Justice Department indicted 52,000 individuals in fiscal 1994. Only 250—less than one half of one percent—were charged with criminal violations of environmental, workplace safety, and consumer protection laws. Yet according to a recent poll, two out of three senior attorneys for 200 corporations said they believed that their companies had operated in violation of such laws in the previous year.

Q. Is the Justice Department adequately or inadequately protecting the public interest?

For Senator Dole

The 1993 tax increase raised rates for only 1.2 percent of Americans, gave a tax cut to 15 million poor workers and their families, and, for the typical family of four, resulted in a 1996 tax rate that was lower than that of 1992, and lower than in much of the Reagan years.

Q. Are you and your fellow Republicans truthful in denouncing the 1993 tax increase as "the largest in history"?

You said in 1983, "When these political action committees give money, they expect something in return other than good government." In 1990, you touted your position on campaign finance reform by referring to your efforts in "cleaning up the campaign sewer money."

Q. If the phrase "campaign sewer money" no longer fairly and accurately reflects your view of PAC contributions, when, how, and why did you change your position?

In the Senate Finance Committee in 1985, you sponsored a successful amendment to hold the excise tax on a can of smokeless tobacco to a mere two cents, which was equivalent to one fifth the excise tax on a pack of cigarettes. It was disclosed last year that U.S. Tobacco, the leading producer of smokeless tobacco, has given $40,000 to your political action committees since 1987, that you've flown dozens of times on UST's corporate jets, and that you have taken many tens of thousands of dollars from UST for your charities and foundations.

Q. Was your sponsorship of the amendment in the Finance Committee related to what you have characterized as "sewer money"?

Q. Do you regret having sponsored the amendment in light of Surgeon General Antonia Novello's December 1992 report that usage of smokeless tobacco, particularly by boys, was causing 30,000 new cases of oral cancer each year?

No Excuses

Having been a reporter for 50 years, I expect some of my colleagues will complain that it is up to the candidates to decide what the issues are, and that the job of the press is to report what the candidates say. Certainly the press should report what candidates say. But nowhere is it written that reporters should not raise important issues that office holders and office seekers choose not to raise.

Some objections will be pragmatic, even embarrassing: I'm only doing what the boss wants. Or, my big-name guest may refuse to return to my television program. It's also true that real-world settings in which questions like these can be asked are limited, certainly at the White House. Moreover—and rightly—no law compels anyone to talk to reporters. And if the president, say, finds that press conferences are doing him more political harm than good, he may decide quite sensibly to stop holding them. So be it: Reporters would be freed to dig out all kinds of useful information that now lies fallow.

Besides, whatever the obstacles, reporters still have ample opportunities to ask needed questions of those who do and would govern us. In 1995, for example, Bob Dole appeared eight times on CBS's "Face the Nation" and five times each on NBC's "Meet the Press" and ABC's "This Week with David Brinkley."

Anyone who prepares a list of questions that deserve more press attention is going to draw from his or her point of view. That's inevitable. And clearly, the questions above reflect mine. But can it seriously be argued that the public wouldn't benefit from more exploration by the press—and explanation by the candidates—of these issues? □

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Memo of the Month

HEARTLAND
AREA EDUCATION AGENCY 11

March 31, 1996

Dear

I am writing to respond to your question regarding appropriate procedures to follow when a staffing team can not agree, or come to consensus, in determining whether a particular student's disability is related to bringing a weapon to school. As you are aware, these situations and the decisions surrounding them are difficult. And, unfortunately, the frequency of these events is increasing at an alarming rate.

We have held a number of manifestation determination conferences in the schools Heartland serves, but this is the first to my knowledge in which the staffing team could not resolve the disability relatedness issue. Therefore I sought legal council. The attorney stated that it is not uncommon for staffing teams to have difficulty in determining disability relatedness and has dealt with this concern in other AEA's and school districts. The advice was: In cases in which a staffing team can not reach consensus in determining whether a particular student's disability is related to bringing a weapon to school, assume the disability is related and proceed accordingly. This conservative approach gives the student the benefit of doubt, provides them with specific due process rights, and is more legally defensible for the school district than to assume the disability is not related. **In summary, if no clear determination can be made, assume the disability is related to the behavior at issue.**

I want to close by commending you and the staffing team for your adherence to following the procedures for determining disability relatedness in weapons related incidents. Not an easy task. Emotions can run high and clear thinking can be clouded. But as I understand how you have proceded in this case, you have done a very fine job.

Please feel free to contact me for further clarification or if any other questions remain.

Sincerely,

James Stumme, Ed.D., Director
DIVISION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

cc: Linda Holloway
Staffing Team

6500 CORPORATE DRIVE, JOHNSTON, IOWA 50131-1603 515/270-9030 1/800/362-2720 FAX 515/270-5383

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Notes of an Opposition Researcher

Politicians who sling mud need someone to dig it up for them

BY THERESA EVERLINE

It's July 1994 and Midwest hot. I get off a plane, pick up a rental car, and drive straight to the state capital library, where I race through the state legislature votes recorded in some state house journals. Newspaper microfilm still must be scoured; document requests are yet to be filled out. Next to me, I keep a list of names of local politicians. After all, before beginning work as an opposition researcher with a D.C.-based political consultant, I'd never even been to this state. The list of names includes the Republican candidate who is the object of my research, current important political officeholders, and the Democrat whom I'm trying to get elected and whom I've never met. This last name is always the hardest to remember. While the Republican grows into a recognizable, if simplified, figure, my Democrat remains shadowy and distant. I wonder if he's a good person.

Before being hired as an opposition researcher, I had been dragging my feet toward a Ph.D. in English literature, and trying to find a real-world component to the books I read and taught. Political theory, feminism, cultural criticism—these made me feel engaged in an abstract, intellectualized way, which was admittedly the only way I knew to be engaged. I voted and had attended a few talks and rallies, but I had no real political experience. For an opposition researcher, though, as I learned over the course of my tenure, knowledge and experience are not really necessary.

In his 1988 book *Candidates, Consultants, and Campaigns*, Frank Luntz attributes the rise of political consultants to two main developments: the increase in the number of election laws, so that candidates need someone to tell them what's illegal; and the importance of new technology, which requires hiring people who can do things like edit commercials. But consultants have ascended from the merely useful. Luntz notes, "Dependent on political consultants, candidates have become less involved in decision making in their own campaigns, sometimes appearing more like spectators than participants in the electoral process." The candidates listen mutely to their poll-watching, personality-remaking consultants—who often know Washing-

Theresa Everline is a writer living in St. Louis.

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ton better than the neophyte, "outsider" candidates—with the result that there's a flatness to everyone. A successful candidate fades into the background, though at the same time he's yelling that the *other* guy's just absolutely wacky. He proves it by swinging around some obscure, probably distorted tidbit.

It was my job to get that tidbit. This was the "political" research: hour after lonely hour sitting in state capital libraries (I got to know several between Illinois and Wyoming), paging through those journals to find votes that could be used against state representative X. Several thousand roll call votes would pass under my glance. The results of my toil gave off the whiff of thorough research, but in reality it was just residue scraped from the surface of the facts. In a matter of seconds, I'd evaluate House Bill 100, which exempts two rural counties from emissions testing. Rep. X voted for it. How many counties were exempt before the bill? Five? None? No way to tell. Was it good for the farmers or bad for the environment? "Bad environmental record," I'd write. Who was I kidding? No one else would be digging any deeper. A "no" vote for a bill encouraging joint placement of siblings in foster care brought out the words "doesn't support keeping families together." Odd little bills that found their way into state legislatures were gold mines. One Republican opposed an amendment requiring employers to give mandatory 10–minute breaks every four hours. An image of Victorian sweatshops was summoned. Nowhere would it be noted that the amendment didn't pass anyway, and that 77 other legislators voted against it as well.

The "personal and professional" research could feel a little, well, unbecoming, even though everything was public record. Statements of economic interest might reveal business ownerships, mortgages, stocks, sources of income, and other sundry items you don't want your neighbors to know. One legislator put "sales rep" as his occupation on his candidacy filings, but his statement of economic interest revealed his only income came from the legislature. Presto—a career politician. Stocks in, say, a gas company would prompt me to keep an eye out for any tax breaks for utilities. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA, pronounced "foy-ah" in the lingo, and regularly used as a verb, as in, "We FOIAed her travel records"), intended to allow access to government records, was used to get a government agency to send me just about anything I damn well wanted—office phone bills, vacation requests, and anything else that might smack of "extravagance." I saw property tax forms (How much does she own? Were her taxes paid on time?); I filed requests with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, looking for records of investigations of businesses owned by candidates; I tried (unsuccessfully) to get copies of the plumbing repair contracts awarded by a city council 25 years ago, to check for cronyism. Several times my company sent me to the Armed Forces Records Center, which happens to be located in my hometown's suburbs, to ask for duty assignments. These all could reveal something that was legitimately questionable in a public servant. I mean, I wasn't trailing anyone in a car. Still, there were moments when I felt like I was watching someone sleep with the curtains open.

Sometimes paperwork was eschewed in favor of creativity. A co-worker was sent to take pictures of an allegedly badly maintained apartment complex. I crossed paths with an opposition researcher from a different company (you could spot them easily, camped in the legislative libraries, journals or microfilm rolls stacked high) who would walk into his subject's campaign office, ask for literature, and chat up the office workers. He'd wear the local university's sweatshirt and put an appropriate bumper sticker on his rental car. Once, in a university library's microfilm room, I heard two people exclaim, "We got it! A picture of him with Clinton!" They were researching the Democrat who employed me, and, at the time, Clinton's low approval rating was considered dead weight that would drag anyone down.

At first I got a kick out of my tasks. There I was, actually involved in the fates of real politicians, the sole person responsible for finding out whether Republican X said outrageous things to newspaper reporters or had a soft spot for lobbyist-supplied baseball tickets. When talking about the work, I could give everything the air of telephoto lenses and dim underground parking garages. Indeed, the unseen powers had decreed that I should not announce my connection to a D.C. firm, so I got some fun out of acting covertly. I doubt now that anyone would have blinked twice at the disclosure of my employer, but it's

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true that two Republicans in Western states made an issue out of our company "looking into their background," as if this were a personal affront, like rummaging through someone's bathroom cabinet. As if they weren't doing it themselves.

During my long-distance phone interview for the job, my eventual boss, Mr. K, told me, "We need someone who can think and write." He told me I'd have to be "insistent." ("I can do that," I lied.) After I was hired, I met Mr. K, who had held some position in Dukakis's campaign, in the office of a Chicago political consulting firm—people who had "worked on the Clinton campaign in '92." All this duly impressed me. Hey, I had seen *The War Room*. They wanted me to accumulate a stream of information that was, at the time, just obscure words tumbling down my notebook: property records, committee testimony, floor speeches, small minority votes, motor vehicle records, FOIA requests, Federal Election Commission (FEC) filings. Who, they wanted me to find out, was contributing to our Republican's campaign? Did he return the favor with legislation? In which bills did he show a special interest by sponsoring? Did they become law, or was he an ineffectual legislator? Was he rich? Was he honest? Did he get speeding tickets?

Sentences like "she consistently favors the interests of business over labor" came singing from my computer.

Later, I learned to read an FEC report. I learned where to find committee assignments, how to negotiate newspaper morgues, and what it's like to be alone at night in some Best Western with a city I'd never seen before blinking outside the window. And I felt what it was like to be weighed down by the press of facts, some only half understood, and others possibly significant but deemed "not useful"—that is, too complex, too peripheral. What could I do, I fretted, with Senate Bill 200, which established a "state over-order premium milk price for dairy farmers for certain milk"? A handy resident of the dairy state where I found myself called this a "huge issue"; I'd been in the state for two days. After mulling it over for a few more, wondering what "certain milk" could be, I concluded that a few pennies of difference in the cost of a gallon of milk would make any D.C. dweller's eyes glaze over.

The company I worked for generally wasn't hired by the campaigns themselves, but rather by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC), which was targeting vulnerable seats and using its funds to give those races a little extra push. "I'm soft money," I announced, delighted, once I understood. But this revelation only drove home the lack of real live candidates in my life. Never did I as much as shake hands with the small-potatoes state reps I was usually helping.

In my opposition research wilderness, there was very little writing going on. "Paper," I was told, "you've got to get the paper, the documentation, so it can be waved around in public if necessary." It was never necessary, although I spent many long nights photocopying roll call votes. I likewise wasn't doing very much thinking. No matter how many voters claim they want to hear about issues, the sound bite and the out-of-context fact still carry the day. Even if my boss said he wanted a full profile and the overall voting trends of my various Republicans, what got his attention were the good "hits": things that could be boldfaced in the final report. Some of Mr. K's other employees did stumble on some curiosities that were worthy of air time, like a physician whose early medical research had been performed on live, cuddly animals, and a candidate who at one time had supported decriminalizing marijuana. After all, our subjects were usually tantalizingly unknown quantities with plenty of unturned stones, the eventual members of Congress's freshman Republican class—the Enid Waldholtzes of the world.

Eventually it became clear: I was not employed to think but to make raw information and pre-cut political strategy look like thought. The campaign needed the *perception* of being thoroughly in the know about the opponent. After that bit of enlightenment, sentences like "She consistently favors the interests of business over the interests of labor," followed by the appropriate backup citations and photocopied votes, came singing from my computer. It dawned on me with a blend of curiosity and alarm that all issues were malleable and even reversible. A candidate who claimed to be tough on crime could be taken

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to task ("she only *talks* tough") for something moderate like a vote against the death penalty; if that same candidate did indeed support several hard-line crime bills, I'd emphasize all the issues she ignored. Never sponsored an economic development bill, huh? If another candidate sponsored worthy bills, I'd look at his success rate in getting them passed. My disillusionment grew with the realization that it wasn't just the campaign's *rhetoric* that was empty; so was its information. I was gathering trivia—lots of it—which I distilled and passed on to Mr. K, who passed it on to the DCCC, which I suppose passed it on to the campaigns. What could possibly be left by that point?

I had liasons with lots of Democrats that summer. I'd help out on one race, then get picked up and dropped in the middle of a different state. Airline ticket, car rental, hotel stay, computer rental, unwavering support of Kinko's—the expenses piled up. Who noticed? The campaign, declared the DCCC, needed more newspaper quotations to show how extreme he is on abortion; or votes for tax increases to prove that she contradicts herself; or information about her husband's line of work (possible favoritism), property holdings ("rich and out of touch"), or legislative attendance record ("misses important votes"). It had become plenty easy to be "insistent." A manic sense of accomplishment would visit, then leave, unfed and sad. Towers of paper would get reshuffled.

I didn't quite make it to the end of my tenure—I quit a few weeks before the November elections that year. Of the half-dozen races that I worked on significantly and knew best, only one of my Democrats won—an outcome typical for the company as a whole. I can't say much of anything about my successful Democratic U.S. representative, which is a sad irony, considering my early excitement over abandoning the abstract in favor of hands-on involvement, and a sublime illustration of the dismaying gap between candidates and their campaigns. These are the truths I learned: Elections are built on out-of-context facts; candidates needn't be present at their own campaigns; and for every race there's somebody somewhere in a Red Roof Inn who can reel off an endless array of information about the opposition, little of which will be heard by anyone. □

Who's Who

Ruth Bader Ginsburg has not proved to be the knee-jerk lefty conservatives feared. Indeed, on states' rights issues she has voted with the conservatives on three 5-4 decisions....

In 1993, in a column arguing against campaign finance limits, **George Will** pointed out that the nation spends more on yogurt than it does on politics. Then this April, Will repeated the fact—only this time he had the prestigious *Yale Law Journal* as a source. Had Will's hunch been confirmed by scrupulous research? Well, not quite. **Frank Murray** of *The Washington Times* looked at the law review article recently and found its source for the yogurt fact—Will's 1993 column!

By the way, Murray points out that yogurt sales are now $2 billion a year and that we spend $8 billion in a four-year election cycle. So, George, it's "the same as," not "more than." Feel free to quote me on that. I can see it now: "As Susan Threadgill points out in *The Washington Monthly*...."

On the day **Bob Dole** resigned from the Senate, the President graciously told a California audience that Dole, despite their differences, should be honored for his service to the country. As Clinton spoke, his campaign headquarters was dispatching a blizzard of faxes, bearing the imprimatur of campaign press secretary **Joe Lockhart**, trashing Dole for walking away from the Senate with unfinished business....

Ten years ago, this magazine dubbed **Norman Ornstein** the "king of quotes" in honor of his being the most cited expert on the folkways of Washington, the man to whom journalists most often turned when they needed someone to tell them what to think—or someone to lend authority to what they were thinking. Recently, our friends at the *National Journal* updated the story and dethroned Norm. The new king is **Thomas Mann** of Brookings. Ornstein is a close second. CNN's **William Schneider** comes in third....

The Washington Lawyer's May/June issue contains several tributes to **Ron Brown** from his fellow attorneys. One, **Tommy Boggs**, the legendary lobbyist and a former law partner of Brown's, tells you all you need to know about Washington in the '80s: "Ron and I first met in 1979 and became instant friends, copying each other as we made some money with Gucci loafers, sports cars, Hartman luggage. It would make me mad that he always looked better with his new toys than I did!"...

Ken Khachigian, who is running **Bob Dole**'s campaign in California, says this about **Bill Clinton**'s current double-

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Liddy's levitation ...Will quotes Will ... and a new kind of congressional record ...

digit lead over Dole in the state polls: "I'd rather be a mile away from hell and heading out than 100 miles away and heading in."...

Those of us who had thought the Red Cross consisted of nice ladies helping people in distress got quite a surprise in *The New York Times* of May 30. It seems only 13 percent of each dollar the Red Cross spends goes toward disaster relief. The big-ticket item is the collection and sale of blood. The blood business brings the agency into competition with local blood banks around the country. It also involves pressing private businesses and government agencies like the Pentagon to help collect or buy blood. So it appears that the woman who may be our next first lady, **Elizabeth "Liddy" Dole**, might be in for trouble if she tries to combine, as she currently says she plans to do, that role with running the Red Cross. "If **Hillary Clinton** raises eyebrows," **Arthur L. Caplan**, the director of The Center for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania, told the *Times*, "the conflicts of Elizabeth Dole running the Red Cross and living in the White House should levitate an entire body."...

Speaking of **Ron Brown**, his family must be sincerely wishing that **Nolanda Hill** would just go away—far away—from any reporter. Hill, the Texas businesswoman who was Brown's benefactor in several business deals that aroused prosecutorial curiosity, is the source of recent allegations that Brown insisted on making the bad-weather flight to Dubrovnik. She has also disclosed that she and Brown had more in common than just friendship and business. According to *The Washington Times,* Brown and Mrs. Hill, a devotee of American Indian spirituality, prayed together with **Robert "Dude" Perry**, a member of the Shoshone-Bannock tribe in Idaho.

Perry, reports the *Times*, "usually prays in a sweat lodge, a dome-shaped hut like a sauna. But, for Mr. Brown, who was almost always traveling, Mr. Perry could build a fire, set up his instruments and turn on the speaker phone."...

Bill Yellowtail's name isn't the only thing that's colorful about him. He also brings a background to his congressional campaign in Montana that fussier souls might not think reeking of promise for electoral success. He has been, reports the *Associated Press*, "a burglar, a wife beater, and a deadbeat dad." And he was expelled from college as a result of two burglaries he committed....

Bill Yellowtail wasn't the only unlikely congressional candidate this year. In Idaho, reports *The Washington Post*'s **Al Kamen**, **Bill Levinger** stripped down to his underwear during the taping of a television interview, offered a reporter $5,000 for a kiss, and was taken away to spend three weeks in a mental health facility. Levinger still got 32 percent of the vote....

The power of the incumbent continues, at least where raising money is concerned. The average Republican freshman, reports **Adam Clymer** of *The New York Times*, began April with $180,362 in contributions while the typical challenger had only $39,270. Only one House Democrat, **Mike Ward** of Kentucky, had less cash than his challenger....

But take comfort, money can't buy everything. **Thad Cochran**'s leadership PAC has made contributions totalling $203,481 to 46 current Republican senators. **Trent Lott**'s has given just $80,000 to only 18 GOP senators. On June 12, Lott's margin of victory over Cochran for Senate majority leader was 44 to 8....

In June, **Bob Dole**'s campaign stopped handing out their candidate's schedule to reporters. The reason was that they didn't want the Democrats to stake out the speech with cell phones and produce one of their famous rapid responses. The problem was it didn't work. One reporter who was frustrated at not knowing Dole's schedule called the Democratic National Committee ... and they knew just where he should go....

—*Susan Threadgill*

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From Great Hope to Scapegoat

Erratic support from the U.S. is threatening to turn the U.N. into just another League of Nations

BY STANLEY MEISLER

Soon after the inauguration of President Clinton, Republican critics, led by former U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, began a drumbeat of derision against the United Nations. They accused Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali of usurping unwarranted power, and they berated the Clinton foreign policy team for supposedly falling under his sway. At its most fatuous moment, the Republican attack included a bill—introduced on the eve of the U.N.'s 50th anniversary—calling for the United States to withdraw from the international organization altogether.

During the last three years, the U.N. has crashed from great heights. At the end of the Persian Gulf War, the feeling in New York was that the U.N. could do anything—so long as the United States, its allies, and Russia agreed. This euphoric mood did not last. By the end of 1995, thanks to America's refusal to pay all its dues, the U.N. was fast approaching bankruptcy. Even more humiliating, the organization was so poorly regarded as a guardian of peace that the United States insisted it have no more than a minor role in the implementation of the Dayton peace accords. Yet it was not the Republican drumbeat that brought the U.N. down. The irony is that the U.N.'s troubles were fueled mainly by its most powerful friends in the Clinton administration.

Instead of defending the U.N. as the most logical instrument for peaceful settlement of Third World crises in a chaotic post-Cold War world, the Clinton administration has chosen to berate the organization as unwise (in Somalia), cowardly (in Bosnia), and inept (in its bureaucracy). The U.S. has also created a leadership crisis by announcing it will veto Boutros-Ghali's bid for a second term. Washington has every right to hold the U.N. to high standards. But the administration's attacks on the U.N. have been so shrill that they have rendered it incapable of dealing with many of the conflicts that now cry out for help.

The Clinton administration has not organized any kind of campaign against the U.N.; instead, it has slowly slipped into a posture of negativism. U.N. Ambassador Madeleine Albright had come to New York espousing a doctrine of "assertive multilateralism," in which the United States would strengthen

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the U.N. while asserting leadership over it. The U.N.'s Somalia mission—tailored to American specifications and run by a retired American admiral—was the model. But the mission soon crumbled into a fiasco. In panic, the Clinton administration not only abandoned "assertive multilateralism" but swiftly branded the U.N. the sole culprit in Somalia. Having used the U.N. as a scapegoat once, the Clinton administration soon found that the world organization could be used as a convenient shield to hide the American failure to come up with a coherent policy for Bosnia.

At the same time, the administration devised a strategy of defending the U.N. in Congress by attacking its management and administration. Tough-minded in their demands for reform of the U.N. bureaucracy, Ambassador Albright and Secretary of State Warren Christopher have tried to persuade Congress that a hard-nosed Clinton administration is whipping the U.N. into a lean organization worthy of American support. The case for reform is strong—the U.N. bureaucracy is often denounced as bloated and inefficient—but the strategy has come at a cost: the failure to make a positive and thoughtful case that, unless the United States wants to play the role of world policeman, it needs the U.N. to deal with the world's conflagrations.

Great Expectations

Since it began, the U.N. has seen its fortunes rise and fall frenetically. President Franklin D. Roosevelt conceived of it as a League of Nations with teeth; he envisioned the Big Five on the Security Council as the Five Policemen who would ensure order in a chaotic world. Americans had high hopes at first that the organization would be an instrument for universal peace. Those hopes, of course, were quickly dashed by the Cold War. The United States was able to galvanize the U.N. into defending South Korea against North Korean aggression in 1950, but only because the Soviet Union was boycotting the Security Council at the time. The enmity between the United States and the Soviet Union paralyzed the Security Council for most of the next 40 years, allowing it to deal only with those problems that were peripheral to the Cold War, like Israel (in the early years), the Suez Canal crisis, the bloody independence of the Belgian Congo, and the civil war in Cyprus. When Third World countries took over the General Assembly and turned the U.N. into an America-bashing society in the 1970s and early 1980s, the organization's reputation plummeted.

But by the early 1990s, with the end of the Cold War and victory in the Persian Gulf, many Americans had renewed hope that the U.N. could finally do what its founding fathers intended. With the United States and Russia in frequent agreement, Ambassador Albright described the Security Council as an "international 911 number." Countries in distress called, and the Security Council responded by dispatching peacekeepers to Cambodia, El Salvador, Angola, Mozambique, Haiti, and other trouble spots. But the U.N.'s self-confidence was shattered by the debacle in Somalia and the crisis in Bosnia.

In Somalia, the defining moment came in October 1993, when a botched raid ended in the death of 18 American Rangers, the humiliation driven home by images of a terrified captured pilot and television scenes of Somalis dragging a dead American through the streets of Mogadishu. The shock of the events panicked President Clinton into a decision to withdraw all American troops from Somalia.

Clinton aides quickly blamed Boutros-Ghali and the U.N. for leading American soldiers into a disaster. The truth was that the special U.S. force of 400 Rangers and Delta Force commandoes had operated completely outside U.N. command. (Indeed, Ambassador Albright reportedly urged the White House to split the blame for the rout between the U.S. and the U.N.) As newspaper editorialists followed the administration's lead, the notion that the U.N. was to blame became firmly cemented in the minds of the public. Although President Clinton did not directly blame Boutros-Ghali in public pronouncements, he encouraged the perception that the U.N. was responsible. In a televised speech to the nation two days after the decision to withdraw, the President announced that new American forces en route to Somalia to pre-

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pare for the withdrawal "will be under American command." This statement, of course, left the false impression that the dead Rangers had *not* been under American command.

In Bosnia, the U.N. was used to hide the scandal of the failure of Europe and the United States to agree about what to do to stop the killing. Most Security Council resolutions were passed, in fact, not to change the situation in Bosnia, but to assuage public opinion at home. Jose-María Mendiluce, the Spaniard who headed the U.N. refugee operation in Bosnia, once said that many U.N. relief workers in Bosnia looked at themselves as an "alibi." Whenever anyone demanded to know what they had done to stop the war, European and American politicians, hiding their guilt, could point to the presence of the U.N. and insist they had done all they could.

Roman Genn

The U.N. was not only an alibi; it was also convenient cover for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's failure to bomb Serb positions. For months, U.S. officials put most of the blame for the lack of bombing on Boutros-Ghali and his representative in the Balkans, Yasushi Akashi of Japan. But the U.N. approved no more than pinprick bombing by NATO for many months because that was what the French and British wanted. Fearing retaliation against their ground forces, which made up the bulk of the U.N. peacekeeping force, they blocked any move for massive bombing. Only when a new French president, Jacques Chirac, agreed with Clinton that it was time to bomb the Serbs toward the negotiating table could NATO unleash its air force on them.

The peace accords did not help the U.N.—far from it. By the time of the Dayton peace accords, the reputation of the U.N. had been so besmirched by critics in Congress and elsewhere that Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke decided to distance his accords from the U.N. American diplomats say Ambassador Albright had proposed that the U.N. run the civilian aspects of the accords while NATO took charge of their military implementation. But that was too much for Holbrooke. Although the U.N. was assigned some duties, such as refugee relief and police training, the United States and Europe appointed former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt as coordinator of the civilian operations of the accord. The appointment of Bildt to a job that should have gone to a high-ranking U.N. official solidified the notion that the U.N. had been a disgrace in Bosnia.

The humiliation finally led to a public spat between Albright and Boutros-Ghali in late 1995. As an aside to the Dayton accords, the United States wanted the U.N. to police the return of Serb-controlled Eastern Slavonia to the Croatian government. After so many months of insults, this proposal angered Boutros-Ghali. If the U.N. was too weak and spineless to do anything about Bosnia, why should it be deemed strong and resourceful enough to police equally volatile Eastern Slavonia? He thought NATO should be asked to do that job as well. But the Clinton administration had had enough trouble persuading Congress to accept American troops in Bosnia; so Albright approached Boutros-Ghali and tried to persuade him not to recommend a NATO operation for Eastern Slavonia. Albright thought she had succeeded, but the Secretary General, in his report to the Security Council, persisted in recommending a NATO operation.

Albright, feeling betrayed, was furious. She issued a statement saying, "I believe it is a grave mistake for the Secretary General to shy away

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from legitimate operations, supported by key members of the Security Council, that advance the prospects for peace in the Balkans." The attack was unprecedented. Ambassadors do not take issue in public with a secretary general's report before it is even discussed in the Security Council. In response, Boutros-Ghali told the Security Council that he was shocked by the "vulgarity" of Albright's statement; she retorted that his comment was "unacceptable." In the end, of course, the United States—the most powerful member of the Security Council—prevailed, and the U.N. took the peacekeeping responsibility in Eastern Slavonia (although, in consolation to Boutros-Ghali, NATO was designated an emergency backup).

Albright's feud with Boutros-Ghali was not an isolated incident. Their public disagreements have come so often that it was no surprise in late June when the administration announced it wanted someone else in the job and would wield its veto if that were the only way to stop him. Boutros-Ghali is surely the most stubbornly independent secretary general in the half-century history of the U.N. He has made the secretary general an international player in a way that has not been seen since the days of Dag Hammarskjold and the crisis in the Congo. But he is a leader who keeps his decisions to himself, trusts very few of his advisers, and delegates little authority. And he is a poor communicator whose remarks are sometimes confusing, offensive, and poorly explained.

The poor image of Boutros-Ghali makes it even more difficult for the U.N. to defend itself from the many accusations that it is a wasteful organization badly in need of reform. The U.N., by its nature, will never be as efficient as, say, the Swiss civil service. Although Americans and Europeans dominate the U.N. bureaucracy, the U.N. comprises 185 member states, and the bureaucracy recruits from as many nations as possible. Whereas English reigns in New York, there are six official languages, and translations inevitably slow up paperwork. Putting bureaucrats from so many cultures and languages together is an inefficiency in itself.

Nevertheless, the U.N. must not hide behind its nature to resist reform. The reforms demanded by the United States are long overdue. The White House has called for consolidation of the bewildering array of U.N. agencies—some operating with no control from New York—that deal with economic development. In fact, most of the embezzlement and waste scandals exposed in the last decade have been rooted in these agencies, rather than in the bureaucracy at headquarters in New York. American calls for an overhaul of personnel practices also make sense. Although some U.N. units, such as the office of peacekeeping operations, are staffed with hard-working and well-trained civil servants, other units bog down in sloth and red tape. All regions of the world need to be represented in the bureaucracy, but this representation must be accomplished via a rational system of selection, promotion, and dismissal. Presently, there is no way to weed out the worthless.

The Clinton administration strategy of defending the U.N. by attacking it has had some limited success: Congress has finally passed an omnibus appropriations bill that restores almost all the cuts made in the Clinton administration's request for this year's payments—provided the restored cuts are made up by reducing spending elsewhere. The White House is hopeful, albeit without much evidence, that Congress will also accept a budget plan to pay back most of the arrears to the U.N. (the United States owed $1.2 billion, the equivalent of a single year's U.N. budget, at the end of 1995) in five annual installments beginning in 1997. This "grand bargain," as the administration dubs the payback plan, is dependent on the U.N. accepting reforms that please the United States.

There are problems, however, in U.S. attempts to link reform to the payment of dues. It is difficult to lead a campaign for reform while you are undercutting the U.N. by refusing to pay all that you owe. Even though the budget axe is wielded in Congress, many governments blame the Clinton administration for fostering an atmosphere that makes it easy for congressmen to refuse payment of all that is owed. Denunciations from some of Washington's closest allies come every day at the U.N. "There is bad blood," said a European ambassador recently. "Many people in the U.N. secretariat and many diplomats believe that the talk about Congress is a smokescreen. If the administration were interested in defending the U.N., it would stand up to Congress."

But unpaid dues are only one part of the problem. The U.N. is also being rendered impotent by

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America's reluctance to support peacekeeping efforts. After Somalia, the White House issued a set of stringent conditions for American participation in—and even support of—any U.N. peacekeeping mission. The conditions were so stringent, in fact, that, if followed to the letter, they would prevent the dispatch of any peacekeeping mission ever. They demanded, for example, an exit strategy—a certainty that a mission could be accomplished in a limited time. The first test of these conditions came in Rwanda in May 1994, when Albright pressured the Security Council into delaying the dispatch of 5,000 peacekeepers until the Secretary General could assure them the new conditions could be met. No one can be sure if the peacekeepers could have prevented it, but thousands of Rwandans died in tribal slaughter during the delay.

Now, it seems that the U.N. can act only on those matters that the United States deems necessary for domestic political reasons. The U.N. was called upon to replace the American troops in Haiti and, as we have seen, to take on the dangerous job of separating the Serbs and Croats in Eastern Slavonia. Where U.S. interest is less evident—the future Somalias and Rwandas—the U.N. will likely do little.

That is especially true in an election year. Although 77 percent of Americans support the country's membership in the U.N. (according to a recent Gallup poll), Bob Dole is trying to score points by proclaiming that as president he would never let Boutros-Ghali decide where to send American troops (implying that Clinton did). The United States, of course, has veto power in the Security Council, and it is absurd to think that Boutros-Ghali could send U.S. troops anywhere without American consent. Dole also knows that the United States has committed troops to very few U.N. missions and that the Clinton administration has no intention of offering more. Yet the Dole attack may net some votes simply by jogging memories over the U.N.-U.S. failure in Somalia.

There is no danger of the United States pulling out of the U.N. A swell of public opposition would meet any serious attempt by American officials to do anything so radical. But the United States is pursuing policies that are bringing the U.N. to its knees. That is a startling phenomenon. Most Americans are not aware of it, and those who are do not seem to care. □

The Washington Monthly

JOURNALISM AWARD

APRIL 1996

Greg Garland
The Baton Rouge Advocate

Baton Rouge entrepreneur Ambassador Lil Barrow-Veal was supposed to get below-market real estate from the federal government and use the housing to help the homeless. Instead, as Garland discovered, Barrow-Veal found more deserving recipients: her friends, relatives, and colleagues.

James S. Kunen
Time

Kunen looks at the widespread rollback of mandatory school busing laws and, by extension, the "failure" of integration. "White flight" and growth in minority populations have segregated our schools and our cities, and caused bitter fights over school funding. America, Kunen gloomily suggests, may be returning itself to a doctrine of "separate but equal," with the support of blacks who once fought against it.

Nicholas von Hoffman
The Washington Post

Americans think of "McCarthyism" as a witch hunt perpetrated by an evil man; von Hoffman contends that during the 1930s and 1940s, the American Left was more closely allied with Marxism–Leninism than it wants to remember. And although liberals properly decried the excesses of anti-communism, recently released evidence shows that communist sympathizers—as well as an array of agents employed by Moscow—had indeed penetrated the American governing establishment.

The Monthly Journalism Award is presented each month to one or more newspaper, magazine, radio, or television stories (or series of stories) that demonstrate a commitment to the public interest. We are particularly interested in reporting that explains the successes and failures of government agencies at all levels and of other institutions such as the media, corporations, unions, and foundations that contribute to the existence or solution of public problems. Please send nominations (including two copies of the article or broadcast text) to Monthly Journalism Award, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009. Nominations for stories run in June or July are due August 15.

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The Best and Worst of Bob Dole

He's left 35 years of footprints

BY JOSHUA WOLF SHENK

By this point, you probably know all about Russell, Kansas, the war wound, and the "mean streak." In an era of personality politics, Bob Dole's personality has been combed over by the very best. We know he's a consummate dealmaker, but that he hates to be boxed in. He's a smooth politician and fiercely loyal, but has an acerbic wit that sometimes gets him in trouble. We know about the great lines ("He could just fly over Kansas in Air Force One," he said when asked if he wanted Nixon to campaign for him) and the disastrous ones ("Democrat wars," "Stop lying about my record").

Most of all, we know that Bob Dole really, really wants to be president.

But Dole's personality offers little clue as to what he'd do if he achieved that goal. On the campaign trail, the ex-senator says he's no Bill Clinton. But what would he do if he sent Clinton back to Arkansas and—a distinct possibility—led a White House backed by a Republican Congress?

Fortunately, Dole has left 35 years of footprints. A freshman House member at the dawn of the New Frontier in 1960, he won a Senate seat in 1968, chaired the Finance Committee in the early '80s, and was the Senate Republican leader from 1985 until he stepped down last month.

What follows are the high and low moments of those 35 years. At his best, Bob Dole is a fiscal conservative who understands that "sacrifice" means more than cutting programs for the poor, and a skeptic of government activism who nevertheless sees the dangerous excesses of an unfettered marketplace. At his worst, Bob Dole is obeisant to the extreme fringes of his party and to wealthy campaign contributors, eschewing tough choices in favor of political advancement.

Obviously, this list reflects certain interests and viewpoints. And no one article can include all of the hundreds of issues Dole has faced in his career. But the facts are revealing nonetheless.

Paradoxically, one revealing element is that clear patterns are difficult to discern from this record—indeed, on many issues Dole has gone to both extremes. Which is the real Dole: the man who inveighs against a gas tax, or the man who voted to

Research assistance provided by Tim Kasulis, Jason Morgan, Amanda Ripley, and Celeste Tarricone.

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raise it 18 times? Is Dole the Gingrich-believer he now claims to be, or the man who made this joke: "You hear Gingrich's staff has these five file cabinets, four big ones and one little tiny one. Number one is 'Newt's Ideas.' Number two, 'Newt's Ideas.' Number three, number four—'Newt's Ideas.' The little one is 'Newt's Good Ideas.'"

These inconsistencies make it all the more important that voters be aware of the candidate's legislative history, both to pressure the candidate to lay out the path he would take as president, and, in the absence of such a clear vision, make their own best judgments about where he would go.

The Worst: No Help for the Poor

Mutter the words "Great Society" in Republican circles and you're likely to hear a chorus of jeers—something akin to talking about Jim Crow at an African-American church. Somehow, a caricatured view of Lyndon Johnson's anti-poverty agenda persists despite the quite popular programs it put in place. Head Start, the grouping of social, health, and educational services to children from deprived families, was enacted in 1965. That year also saw the introduction of guaranteed student loans for college.

Bob Dole voted against both those programs—and many more. He opposed Medicaid and cast votes against public broadcasting and a teacher corps. By the time Bill Clinton was elected, Dole's opposition to social spending had hardened to such an extent that anything other than jails, weapons, or entitlements for the elderly had become "pork." In recent years, he's raised that cry against crime prevention, education, and national service programs.

Dole has shown a similar tendency to oppose requirements that the private sector pay decent wages to the working poor. He opposed increases in the minimum wage in 1961, 1966, 1972, 1973, 1987, 1988, 1993, 1995, and 1996. Although he made tepid offers to bring a vote on the most recent minimum wage hike—in exchange for a gas tax reduction—he resigned from the Senate without having done so.

Meanwhile, since 1961 Dole has voted to raise his own pay seven times. Over that 35-year period, the Senator's pay has increased 50 percent more than the minimum wage .

The Best: Defending the Hungry

A striking exception to Dole's opposition to social spending is his championing of programs to help feed the poor. He was converted to the cause when he joined the Senate select committee on nutrition and human needs, chaired by liberal standard-bearer George McGovern. Together, the senators sponsored a bill in 1975 to expand food stamp benefits to the poor, and thereafter won a major expansion in the school lunch program, inaugurated the Women, Infants, and Children program, and published a seminal report on dietary guidelines for the American public.

"He was extremely good on those issues," McGovern says. "There was a humanitarian impulse, and, also, it was a way to find new outlets for Kansas farmers. So it was self-interest combined with humanitarian purposes, but he was fully committed.... And he really brought the Republicans around. We put those votes through by votes of two- or three-to-one."

Dole showed little patience for fellow Republicans who sought to squeeze money from food programs. When Senator James Buckley, a conservative from New York, tried to toughen requirements for food stamps, Dole joked mordantly: "Do you put in a funeral allowance, for the ones who starve?"

"Some of these new people seem to think that government is our enemy," McGovern says. "But Dole has never shared that view.... He's never ruled out the possibility or even the need for government action."

The Best: Civil Rights, Equal Protection

Another reminder of Dole's willingness to use government to advance the cause of the vulnerable is his consistent support for civil rights and anti-discrimination legislation. He voted for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965, for a civil rights/housing law in 1968, and the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution in 1972. That year, he also voted for a bill putting teeth in the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

When the Reagan administration tried to narrow the interpretation of laws against sex discrimination, Dole successfully fought it. He also played an absolutely crucial role in the passage of the

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1982 extension of the Voting Rights Act, building bridges between liberals and a resistant Reagan administration. "He was superb," civil rights activist Joseph Rauh told Dole biographer Jake Thompson. "He got us the perfect bill." Though his record is surely mixed on gay issues, he has spoken out broadly against discrimination. Dole also supported the Civil Rights Act of 1991 (though he voted against a similar bill in 1990) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Bob Dole has opposed increases in the minimum wage nine times since 1961. In the same period, he has voted to increase his own pay seven times.

Dole's very first speech on the Senate floor was a plea for government assistance to the disabled. In 1994, on the 25th anniversary of that speech, Bill Clinton had this to say: "It was one of those magic moments in the history of Congress, and maybe of our country, which reminds us all, for all of our differences, there's a common chord that unites us when we are all at our best."

The Worst: PAC Man

Dole has regularly voted against campaign finance reform—most recently in 1993, 1994, and 1995. He voted against limiting radio and TV spending in 1970; against contribution limits in 1973 and 1986; against public financing in 1974, 1977, 1987, and 1990.

How does he explain these votes? "We Republicans want no part of shifting our campaign burden to the public," he has said, framing the issue as one of individual responsibility versus state welfare. But, as the Center for Responsive Politics' Ellen Miller is fond of saying, the public can pay for campaign financing up front—or they can pay on the other end, when politicians do favors for big donors.

Dole has raised formidable sums of money—at least $47.6 million for his Senate and presidential campaigns and his leadership PAC from mid-1973 through 1994, according to Charles Lewis's *The Buying of the President*. And he has indeed shown a tendency to reward his benefactors. With Dole's help, Ernest and Julio Gallo (who have given more than $1.2 million to Dole's campaigns, PACs, and foundations) received a customized inheritance tax loophole in the 1986 tax reform bill. Dole has also fought off efforts to eliminate the Market Promotion Program, which yielded Gallo more than $23.8 million between 1986 and 1994.

And then there is the Archer Daniels Midland Company, the agribusiness giant. Since 1979, ADM and CEO Dwayne Andreas have given Dole's campaigns, PAC, think tank, and foundation close to half a million dollars—not to mention the $500,000 given by the Andreas Foundation to the Red Cross shortly after Elizabeth Dole took over. Dole has returned the favor with vigorous advocacy of ethanol, a product for which ADM has more than 60 percent of market share. In 1989, for example, Dole blocked a steel import bill until the ethanol excise tax credit was extended until the year 2000. Lewis cites an industry analyst who estimated that, in 1987 alone, ADM would receive $150 million from the federal ethanol program.

ADM and Gallo are the famous examples, but there are others. In 1992, Dole won extension of a tax credit to subsidize drillings for natural gas, despite a glut. The credit was worth 92 cents for every dollar of gas sold. One huge beneficiary was the Enron company, which has also given Dole's endeavors more than $100,000 over the years.

In 1996, no special interest wants Dole in the White House more than big tobacco, which has donated generously to his campaign. In recent comments criticizing the FDA's plan to regulate tobacco, Dole made it clear he would deliver. He has even portrayed the addictiveness of cigarettes as a debatable issue: "To some people, smoking is addictive," he said just last month. "To others, they can take it or leave it. Most people don't smoke at all.... We know it's not good for kids. But a lot of other things aren't good. Some would say milk's not good." In the past, Dole has consistently favored tobacco price supports and subsidies and, with rare exceptions, opposed cigarette taxes.

The Best: Fairer Taxes

Publicly enthusiastic, Dole supported the Reagan tax cuts of 1981, though he helped convince

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the administration to scale back the cuts from 30 percent over three years to 22 percent. But by the following year, the deficit was mushrooming, and Dole began to craft a series of budgets that raised taxes and cut spending. His 1982 budget, the Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act (TEFRA), sought $98.4 billion in new taxes over three years. Though he certainly bit into the middle class, Dole also went hard after the wealthy individuals and corporations that had benefited most from Reagan's cuts. For example, he cut tax breaks for defense contractors and for "safe harbor" leasing, whereby money-losing companies could sell tax losses to profitable companies. During hearings on TEFRA, Dole is said to have walked outside the Finance Committee room and noted the lobbyists standing "Gucci to Gucci." "They'll be barefoot in the morning," he joked. In 1983, 1984, and 1985, Dole continued to press for fiscal responsibility and balanced budgets. Not only did he pick fights with the White House, Dole also led his party down a politically unpopular path. Elected as majority leader in 1985 when Howard Baker stepped down, Dole lost that position in November 1986 when Republicans were ousted as the controlling party in the Senate. Democrats used Dole's budgets—and his prominent role in restructuring Social Security (see below)—to their advantage in that election.

In 1982, Dole went hard after the wealthy. At one point, he noted a group of lobbyists in Gucci shoes and said, "They'll be barefoot in the morning."

In 1990, Dole played a role in brokering a compromise budget between Democrats and Republicans. He also has a record—albeit an inconsistent one (see below)—of seeking tax breaks for the most needy Americans. In 1978, he voted for $4.5 billion in tax relief for people making less than $50,000, particularly those making $10,000 to $30,000. And in 1989, he moved to expand the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

The Worst: Welfare for the Wealthy

In 1982, Dole wrote in *The Washington Post,* "I never defined conservatism as the religion of the propertied few or of those whose voices carry in direct proportion to their wealth." That's the Bob Dole who went after corporate loopholes and insisted that the rich pay a fair share towards reducing the deficit. But Dole has also lurched in the opposite direction. Besides carrying Reagan's water in 1981, Dole in 1995 supported a massive tax cut for the wealthiest Americans—about $19 billion for the wealthiest five percent—and a $31 billion cut in the EITC for the working poor. Despite Dole's efforts from 1982 to 1985 to distribute the burden of tax increases more fairly, the net effect from 1977 to 1985 was higher rates on the poorest 40 percent and lower rates—15.1 percent lower—on the richest one percent. The damage done in '81 was never fully repaired.

Dole's worst moment on budget matters was surely his campaign against the Clinton budget deal in 1993. The hypocrisy is simply spectacular. Dole calls the bill "the largest tax increase in world history." But both in inflation-adjusted dollars and as a percentage of the economy, Dole's tax increases in 1982 were larger. Dole and fellow Republicans also assailed Clinton for not cutting more spending. But his bills in the early '80s had a much higher proportion of tax hikes to spending cuts. In 1983, Dole proposed a plan that would cut $39 billion in spending and raise $75 billion in taxes. In 1982, Dole shepherded—and Reagan signed—a budget package with $98.3 billion in tax increases and $17.5 billion in spending cuts over three years. "Dole helped Reagan in '81 and then did penance all the way through the beginning of the '90s," says Robert McIntyre of Citizens for Tax Justice. "Then when Clinton got elected, [Dole] abandoned his adult leadership for childish leadership. The way he's going, he'll be in the womb by the November election."

Dole's campaign against government spending is also contradicted by his weak spot for costly weapon systems of dubious merit. Dole voted to support the "Star Wars" Strategic Defense Initiative—which to this day has consumed $43 billion in taxpayer money—in 1984, 1987, 1988, and 1989. (Fittingly, one of Dole's last two votes in the Senate was for a similar, though less ambitious, missile defense system.)

A few examples of other costly weapons systems that won Dole's votes: The B-1B bomber in

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1981; the MX Missile in 1981, 1983, 1984, and 1985, and the Trident submarine in 1973.

Dole also has a sad record on corporate welfare. He has supported sugar subsidies, for example, while opposing a Clinton proposal to require mining companies to pay fair market rates for federal lands, instead of the giveaway rates of as low as $2.50 an acre.

The Best: Courage on Entitlements

Though Republicans are getting a drubbing in the polls for taking on Medicare—well-deserved, insofar as they seemed to cut the program excessively while giving tax breaks to the rich—Dole generally deserves credit for his willingness to touch the third rail of American politics: entitlements. All honest assessments of our fiscal future show this country heading over a financial cliff if it follows through on current promises of Social Security and Medicare. But few politicians are willing to take even the mildest steps to correct the problem.

Dole has. His early-'80s budgets capped cost-of-living increases on Social Security. In 1983, he joined a commission that made some important changes in overhauling Social Security—such as delaying COLAs and raising the retirement age to 67 (though not until the year 2027). This highlights another hypocritical element of Dole's fight against Clinton's 1993 budget, which raised taxes on Social Security payments to the well-off.

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Learn all aspects of magazine publishing. Handle circulation, subscriptions, direct mail, and budget. Send resumé to Rebecca Gray.

PRODUCTION MANAGER/ ART DIRECTOR

Must have experience with Macintosh, Photoshop, and Quark XPress. Send resumé and cover letter to David Linker.

1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009

The Worst: Abandoning Health Care

If Dole could take back any one moment in his political career, it might have been this recent comment: "I was there, fighting the fight, voting against Medicare—one of 12, because we knew it wouldn't work in 1965."

Dole did indeed vote against Medicare in 1965. The accusation that he's still the program's enemy could cost him in November. But what's more disturbing about that comment is that it highlights a shameful legacy on health care. A man who prides himself on getting things done, Dole has nevertheless ignored this vexing problem. In 1993 and 1994, he played games with reform—at first strongly supporting universal coverage, then working to scuttle any reform whatsoever. Most recently, Dole played politics with the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill. If he had agreed to vote on Medical Savings Accounts separately, the bill would have passed easily. But he did not.

The Worst: Trusting Used Car Dealers

Dole has never been enthusiastic about regulation to protect consumers, the environment, health, or safety. To his credit, he did vote for a truth in lending bill in 1968, the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1972, and for the bill that created the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

But a long list of votes against the environment—"no" on the Clean Air Act in 1963, the Air Quality Standards Act in 1970, and the Clean Water Act extension in 1987, to name just three examples—may come back to haunt him. That's particularly true after the 104th Congress, when Dole authored a regulatory "reform" package that pleased party zealots and the business lobbies, but would have been a disaster for everyone who cares about safe workplaces, clean air and water, safe food and drugs, and every other area protected by federal regulation. With a 21 percent career rating from the Consumer Federation of America, this is a weak spot for Dole. One of the lowest of the lowlights: In 1982, he voted against a Federal Trade Commission regulation that required used car dealers to tell customers of major defects that the dealers know about. □

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Ernest Bombingway

BY ART LEVINE

"Teodoro [Kaczynksi] wrote in bad Hemingway sentiments..."
—Maureen Dowd on the Unabomber in The New York Times

To: Jim Freeman, Unabomber task force
From: Special Agent Thomas Mohnal
Re: We found the enclosed document in the suspect's cabin. It seems to be an excerpt from some sort of quasi-autobiographical novel. Please have it catalogued and analyzed by the psychological profiling unit. There's also a "To Do" list that may prove useful.

FOR WHOM THE BOMB TOLLS

The cabin was in a forest at the end of a dirt road, and from his front door he could see the ponderosa pine trees and larches, hundreds of feet high, and it was good. The snow started falling, dry and powdery, and it covered the trees and the road and the land in whiteness. Tall and thin, Theodore Kingman was a rugged mountain man who had a sunburned face and calloused hands, and he started to hunt the big game. He knew from the freshness of their tracks that the rabbits were near, but he had to look closely to see them because the rabbits were white and not so easy to see in the snow. He took the .22 rifle lying next to the door of the little brown wooden house and walked back and forth underneath the bare trees towering over him. After a few hours of this, he got very hungry. Then he heard a noise behind his cabin, and he turned to see a rabbit move between two pine trees. He lifted his gun and shot the animal, and there was red blood on the white snow. Theodore Kingman was now ready to eat lunch.

He stayed alone in the woods and usually did not need other people around him. They did not understand him anyway because he had gone to Harvard and read Paul Goodman in the original English. He was a genius who could have won a Nobel Prize like the great Einstein, but he chose to live five miles outside of a small town in Montana at the foot of a mountain. It was very far from the big cities where Theodore Kingman once lived as a brilliant math professor whose work could only be understood by two other experts, both of them dead. His cabin had no electricity and no running water, but in the forest there were also no traffic jams that took freedom away from the walking man and no factories that destroyed the environment. A man could be free to live in nature, especially if his mother sent him checks every few months. But nature could not survive if the industrial-technological system continued to destroy it. Theodore Kingman had to fight the system if there were going to be any places left where it was clear and cold and dry, and the snow was white and powdery, and the hunting was good. He knew he must build bombs.

He cooked the rabbit and, after the meal, returned to making an explosive device that would help spark a revolution against industrial society, or at least make the "CBS Evening News with Dan Rather." He took a copper pipe and attached a metal plate to one end with a manual drill that made his hand ache. His mind was clear and focused as he worked, thinking only of demolition and the Ben-Gay for his hand. Soon the bomb would be ready. He planned to mail it to an executive who was planning a gold-mining oper-

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ation that would poison the clear water of the Blackfoot River and the big trout that swam upstream.

Becky Garcia, he thought, would be impressed. She was the president of the Save Our Streams organization that was fighting to stop the gold mine. He wanted to help her win the battle against the greedy owners and to show her his extensive collection of triggering devices.

She worked at the little grocery store in town and she had hair that was dark like rich soil, and she sometimes smiled at him when he came in to buy flour and dry goods. He knew she craved him but he tried to keep his mind on the bombs. Now he rode into town on his bicycle that did not pollute the air like the automobiles. She stood near the cash register when he entered, and she had tawny brown skin and high cheekbones and eyes that saw clearly into his. "Salud, Teodoro," she said, but she was not smiling.

"What is wrong, little one?"

"The court has given permission for the mining company to start tearing up the earth. We cannot stop them."

"Do not be afraid," he said. "I know how to build bombs that will kill your enemies. Come back to my house and I will show you."

"You can stop them, Teodoro?" she said, smiling through her tears. Later, back at the cabin, she looked at the jars of potassium chloride and zinc and silver oxide on his shelves and asked him, "What are these for?"

"They are for you," he said. "When I mix them together in a way that is good and true they become a chemical that makes a big bang." Soon he held her tight next to him and kissed her and felt her trembling in his arms. "Did you feel the earth move?" she said afterwards.

"Yes," he said. "The bomb in my backyard is very powerful."

****

Things to Do This Month – April 1995

1. Call Mort Janklow's agency again on "For Whom The Bomb Tolls" manuscript. Question for him: Would more sex scenes help? Question for me: If he doesn't accept it, should I add him to my "mailing list"?
2. Play up Oklahoma bombing angle in queries to editors.
3. Mail letter bomb to forestry lobbyist or other enemy of the environment.
4. Make death threat to George Plimpton at Paris Review to speed up response time on my short story.
5. Send out film treatment of novel, call CAA and ICM on getting it routed to the right people. Some casting possibilities: Tommy Lee Jones as Theodore Kingman (or is Peter Fonda still available?); Sandra Bullock or Rosie Perez as Becky Garcia. Dennis Hopper to direct? Insist on having casting veto power in exchange for movie rights: can't have Hopper, John Malkovich, or Bruce Dern playing the character as some sort of madman.
6. Finish technology manifesto, contact N.Y. Times and Washington Post about publishing it. New demand: publish the anti-technology manifesto, and I'll never kill again. Fallback position: publish an 800-word op-ed piece, and I'll only maim people.
7. Call Mom, ask for loan.
8. Call brother, remind him that he is an evil tool of the techno-industrial empire.
9. Call Great Expectations Video Dating Service, set up appointment.
10. Fix septic tank.

Art Levine is a contributing editor to The Washington Monthly.

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You're Absolutely, Positively Pre-Approved. Maybe

How credit card companies twist the truth—and why regulators let them

BY GLENN HODGES

Finally I was getting the truth: "Pre-approved doesn't always mean pre-approved." In one sentence, and without a hint of irony, a single customer service representative was correcting the ad copy of countless "pre-approved" credit card offers.

I was talking to FCC National Bank, the fourth largest bank card issuer in the country, the single largest issuer of gold cards, and, as a subsidiary of First Chicago NBD Corp., a "banking industry pioneer," according to *The American Banker*. Growing at a rate of 40 percent a year, FCC is certainly a pioneer, but of what—and at whose expense? For in their frenzy to get ever-bigger slices of a tight credit card market, banks like FCC are taking bold liberties with the truth in their ad copy. In better days, we might have called it lying.

"Banks are promising customers the moon to get them to sign up," says Robert McKinley, president of CardTrak, a credit card research firm. "It's a very competitive market."

Call it explosive. Banks mailed 2.7 billion credit card solicitations in 1995, triple the number they mailed only three years earlier. Two thirds were "pre-approved," and half were for gold cards, which have credit limits of at least $5,000 and, often, perks like extended warranty protection and rental car insurance. Because gold card customers have more money to spend and are generally better credit risks, banks want as many of them as possible. But they don't want the wrong people—people with too much debt or not enough income. The solution? Offer gold cards to everyone who meets certain pre-screened qualifications, then weed out the undesirables. Says McKinley, "I've seen [solicitations] from consumers who've had bankruptcies and everything else—terrible credit—yet they have been 'pre-approved' for a gold card. It's obvious that it's not a serious offer."

By law (with a few exceptions) banks are required to offer credit to anyone whose credit report they pre-screen; so they give the people who don't make the final cut no-frills cards with lower credit limits. It's a common practice, but most banks are semi-honest about it; they tell you up front that your "pre-approval" is conditional—you need this much income, or your credit report needs to pass a more thorough screening. But a few banks—and we're not talking fly-by-night outfits—are trying to shortcut the pro-

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cess by hiding or omitting the unpleasant details, and deceiving as many people as possible into responding. This way, they not only get all the gold card customers they can, they also get a host of regular card customers with the false lure of the gold card. And they profit on all of them.

Meanwhile, unsuspecting consumers are not getting what they're promised, and they're getting something they never wanted in the first place. (At one point, some banks tried having a box on their gold card solicitations for customers who wanted regular cards if they were turned down for gold cards; so few checked it the practice was quickly discontinued.) Since too many credit inquiries and accounts can imperil future credit applications, people may have problems if they keep going for these gold cards they're promised and wind up with pockets full of $500 Visas. "People don't realize the damage it may be doing to their credit reports," says Sandy Comenetz, an attorney in the legal department of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). "They may not find out until they apply for a loan and the bank questions it because of all these entries."

Dear Glenn P. Hodges,

You were recently invited to accept a no-annual-fee Visa Gold card with a credit line of up to $5,500.00. You're still pre-approved, and here's all you need to do to get your card:

Just send back the enclosed Certificate before 5/15/96

We'll send your new Visa Gold card as soon as we hear from you. There's no annual fee, so you risk nothing. And [illegible] sure to [illegible] your [illegible] card.

[illegible] gree to be bound [illegible] on Credit Card Agree[illegible] copy of it when I recei[illegible] no[illegible] transferable or assignable and does not apply to corporate accounts. I am at least 18 years of age and a U.S. resident. Terms subject to change without notice. If I do not qualify for a VISA Gold credit card, I apply for a regular VISA credit card. The minimum credit limit will be $500.

All that Glitters is Not Gold

Having been turned down for a "pre-approved" gold card once myself (when my graduate student income failed to meet the $30,000 minimum), I wanted to know how banks justified their double-dealing. I got the chance to find out when I got a letter from FCC National Bank. They assured me I was approved for a gold MasterCard, that all I had to do was return a form and wait for delivery. Meanwhile, their fine print on the back said they would review my information and *then* decide if I'd get a gold or "classic" card (with a minimum credit limit of $500). I called them. How, I asked, could I be pre-approved for the gold card, and yet not pre-approved?

After the customer service rep told me that "pre-approved doesn't always mean pre-approved," I was transferred to a "credit approver" who told me, "They tell you you're pre-approved for the gold because the solicitation is *for* the *gold*. They want people in this particular bracket."

So it's OK for them to say whatever they want on the front of the letter as long as the real deal is in the fine print? "That's right," she said, "If they *didn't* put that there, *then* they would have to give you what they solicit you for."

Putting the details of an offer in fine print is nothing new, and not necessarily a problem. But it is a problem when even the fine print omits crucial details, or when the offer and its fine print are so at odds that they're totally contradictory. Everyone from the Federal Trade Commission to the Direct Marketing Association to the Better Business Bureau holds that fine print is no magic elixir; it doesn't automatically exonerate a company for anything else it may say.

FCC National is not the only (or the largest) bank that doesn't quite seem to get this. First Union Corporation is the sixth-largest bank holding company in the nation, and it has the 14th- largest credit card business. Like FCC, First Union's card business is mushrooming, growing an average of almost 40 percent a year over the last three years. They too are heavily into direct mail solicitation, and their ad copy is even worse than FCC's.

First Union's letter to me also said I was pre-approved for a gold card, and all I needed to do to get it was return a certificate. "We'll send your new Visa Gold card as soon as we hear from you," it stated, "...you risk nothing." Nowhere in the body of the letter was there any indication that the pre-approval was in any way conditional. It was only the very last line of the half-page of fine print that read, "If I do not qualify for a VISA gold credit card, I apply for a regular VISA credit card. The minimum credit limit will be $500."

When I called to ask how I'd know whether I'd get the gold card or not, a customer service rep said, "I have no way of knowing. There's no way

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to know without applying." The second time I called, I was told something entirely different: I would need a blemish-free credit record and a $30,000 annual income. If I didn't qualify, I'd automatically get the regular card, which doesn't have the same perks as the gold card. I had to talk to four people to get the whole story—all information that should have been in the letter in the first place.

The consensus of experts who have reviewed this offer is that it is well beyond the pale. Representatives of the Direct Marketing Association, the Better Business Bureau, and even the Federal Reserve, the primary bank regulator, say it's deceptive. Ruth Susswein, president of Bankcard Holders of America, says, "It most certainly is misleading, no doubt about it. It shouldn't be 'preapproved.' It just shouldn't say that. That's what makes it so misleading."

Regulators, Shmegulators

So how does the nation's sixth-largest banking corporation get away with it, especially when the Federal Trade Commission prohibits unfair and deceptive advertising practices and specifies that "deception occurs when there is a representation or omission that is likely to mislead consumers acting reasonably under the circumstances"? Easy. Banks, unlike most businesses, don't answer to the FTC. They're regulated by any of four federal banking agencies, none of which has the same kind of detailed false advertising standards that the FTC has. They have, well, pretty close to nothing.

The Federal Reserve, which by charter has the responsibility for taking the lead on consumer protection issues among the bank regulators, admits as much: "There is no standard for determining if something's unfair or deceptive," says Adrienne Hurt, a managing counsel in the consumer affairs division of the Fed. Though the Fed has the authority to issue regulations and guidelines, they haven't used it to define or specifically prohibit unfair or deceptive advertising practices.

This is not a surprise to people who follow consumer protection issues in the banking industry. "Consumer protection has never been a priority for the bank regulators. In fact, they bend over backwards to protect the banks' interests," says Ed Mierzwinski, consumer program director at the U.S. Public Interest Research Group. When it comes to deceptive marketing, he says, "banks are pushing the limits because they know there's no enforcement of the law."

Indeed, when Jean Noonan, who closely followed consumer credit issues as the FTC's former associate director for credit practices, hears descriptions of these offers, she says, "It sounds like the bank regulators might not be vigilant in criticizing institutions for misleading mailings."

That sure seems to be the case. Not only do they have nothing on the books that specifically addresses the issue, their reputation for moving glacially on consumer protection issues is well-deserved. The Federal Reserve (which regulates bank holding companies and state-chartered, Fed-member banks) and the FDIC (which regulates state-chartered banks that are not members of the Fed) both report that they are aware of the phenomenon described here, that they consider it a problem, and that they "are looking at it." But they're taking their time. According to Hurt at the Fed, "We've been looking at this for almost a year now. We want to move cautiously before any public action is taken."

Meanwhile, the deceptive solicitations keep rolling out. The banks aren't worried, because even if the Fed does attack, it's got no teeth. "The FTC and Fed pursue things differently," says Leonard Chanin, a managing counsel in the Fed's consumer affairs division. "The FTC goes to court. At the Fed, we would simply contact the bank and—if we felt what they were doing was illegal—we'd ask them politely to change it." Some deterrent.

It doesn't get much better over at the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC), which oversees all national banks and, therefore, most of the large credit card operations (including FCC and First Union). According to Alan Dombrow, an OCC national bank examiner, the OCC doesn't penalize banks for misleading advertising or require them to reimburse consumers whom they may have bilked. "We write them up and tell them to go forward and sin no more," he says. "We have the authority to write rules, but to my knowledge the OCC has never done that. We don't do it because the bank will just correct the practice." Of course, there's nothing to stop the bank from making a similar "mistake" down the road.

To make matters worse, bank examiners may not have as critical an eye as they should when it

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comes to spotting the problems in the first place. "When our examiners are looking at the materials, they're looking with a different level of understanding," says Dombrow. "If they understand it, they figure it's OK. But they do tend to understand more than the average consumer. So the banks are not likely to be written up for something that's a little oblique." When I describe First Union's solicitation, Dombrow says, "I think we probably would have to take issue with that." But the wording must be merely "oblique" to the examiners who cover FCC and First Union, because it's apparent that neither of them has been chastised for their mailings. (I got my latest from FCC in June.) True, bank examiners surely have larger concerns than the wording of credit card offers. But if they're letting this slide, what else is slipping by?

Four Fickle Fiefdoms

The irony is that, while it is the Fed and FDIC that profess to be taking the closest look at this problem, it is the OCC that oversees most of the troublemakers. (The Office of Thrift Supervision regulates savings and loans, which tend not to be major players in the credit card market.) If that doesn't make sense to you, you're not alone. The fractured banking regulatory apparatus is a senseless system that grew out of historical accident rather than conscious design. It's complicated, inefficient, and duplicative; more than one of the regulatory agency employees I spoke with acknowledged that having four separate regulators makes it more difficult to monitor problems and devise solutions. Over the years, scores of lawmakers, presidential administrations, special commissions, and agency heads have advocated a single bank regulator; Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen most recently headed a charge for the Clinton administration. Unfortunately, that effort, like all that came before it, was torpedoed. This time it was the Fed, buttressed by the banking industry, that led the fight against it.

Why? Two reasons. First, the bank regulators don't want to lose their turf. Former Senator William Proxmire told the Banking Committee in 1991 of his earlier efforts to consolidate the regulatory functions of the Fed, FDIC, and OCC: "I seriously underestimated the depth of the entrenched opposition to regulatory consolidation. All three bank regulatory agencies vehemently opposed the legislation. *Privately, however, each agency let it be known it would withdraw its objections if it could assume the powers of the other two.*" [emphasis added]

Second, the banks have a sweetheart deal. When deciding how to charter themselves and their subsidiaries, they can look for the regulator that's willing to give them the easiest treatment. Because the regulators don't want to lose their banks to other agencies, they may be inclined to soften their oversight. As Paul Starobin writes in the *National Journal*, "Lawmakers have long warned that the shopping-around threat encourages lax regulation."

It may be telling that most major credit card companies are chartered as national banks, placing them under the watch of the OCC, which has a demonstrably more lenient record in examinations for truth-in-lending violations (dealing with issues like disclosure of terms and interest rates) than the other three regulators. Between 1992 and 1994, the Fed found violations in an average of 83 percent of its examinations; the FDIC, 78 percent; the OTS, 69 percent; and the OCC, only 49 percent.

But the bank regulators don't need to merge to solve the problem of deceptive advertising. The Fed can easily issue a regulation or guideline spelling out the parameters of deceptive advertising, as the FTC has done. More specifically, it can force banks to qualify their use of the term "pre-approval." As McKinley at CardTrak notes, "The word is used freely, but it's really nothing more than 'pre-screened.' It needs to be better defined—that 'pre-approved' means approved, not just screened or pre-qualified." It's a simple solution. And where the Fed goes, the other regulators are required to follow.

Professing to need more time to study the issue is a weak (if time-honored) excuse. Though the problem seems to have worsened recently, it has been around for a number of years. In 1991, Bankcard Holders of America president Elgie Holstein testified to Congress that, "The problem with 'pre-approved' offers is that the consumer has no way of knowing ... how firm the offer is.... If the offer is conditional, it should say so prominently, and describe the conditions of the offer."

That's not too much to ask. And if some of our largest banks are proving themselves not up to the task of telling the truth, then our regulators shouldn't hesitate to make them. □

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The Tree Shaker

Jesse Jackson's influence is at an historic low. But don't write off the man from Greenville yet

BY CLARENCE PAGE

Jesse: The Life and Pilgrimage of Jesse Jackson
Marshall Frady, *Random House, $28.50*

"Great things happen in small places. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Jesse Jackson was born in Greenville."
—Jesse Jackson, 1988 interview

Had there been no Jesse Jackson, it would have been necessary to invent him. As it happened, he invented himself. Or, in keeping with time-honored American traditions, he reinvented himself.

No phase of that reinvention was more controversial than the "bloody shirt" incident. Just after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, Jackson, then a 27-year-old aide to King, appeared on national television and spoke to the Chicago City Council wearing a shirt stained with King's blood, while other still-shaken Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) officials prepared for the funeral. He did not exactly say that King died in his arms, but neither did he do anything to discourage the notion.

Journalist Marshall Frady's reconstruction of the episode in his new biography, *Jesse: The Life and Pilgrimage of Jesse Jackson*, is riveting. The slain leader's blood was puddled so heavily on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel that the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, King's closest aide, was able to scoop it up with a piece of cardboard from a laundered shirt and pour it into a jar. ("This is Martin's precious blood,"Abernathy cried. "His blood was shed for us.") The earnest and ambitious Jackson already had worked his way quickly into the upper ranks of the SCLC, propelled in part by his restless desire to take charge—sometimes without the advance approval of his superiors.

As another King aide (and future Atlanta mayor), Andrew Young, described it to Frady:

> "I can see Jesse going over and leaning down and placing both his palms down flat in that pool of blood, and then standing up and, like this"—and Young slowly passes both his hands down his chest—"wiping it down the front of his shirt...."

What are we to make of this scene? Was it bizarre opportunism? Many thought so. Among them were Coretta Scott King and others who would not speak to Jackson for years to come.

Or was it a sincere attempt by Jackson, in this moment of stunning, profound grief, to assume the mantle he felt obliged, even destined, to take? Frady, like Young, casts this astonishing moment in a remarkably favorable light, as he casts Jackson's other similarly questionable actions, but here his defense of Jackson is persuasive. Frady quotes some whose anger with Jackson over the bloody shirt episode remains alive years later. But he also quotes other soldiers in the cause who are more willing to excuse Jackson's act and his unwillingness to talk about it, even to the editors and ghostwriters who have tried over the years to help him write the autobiography he has yet to complete. He may not remember all that went on that day himself, they say. Young, a Baptist minister, offers a theological explanation: "We Baptists, you know, we believe there's power in the blood—power that's transferable."

The young Jackson already had established a reputation for what Frady calls "a magnificence of spirit

Clarence Page is a syndicated columnist for the Chicago Tribune *and author of* Showing My Color: Impolite Essays on Race and Identity.

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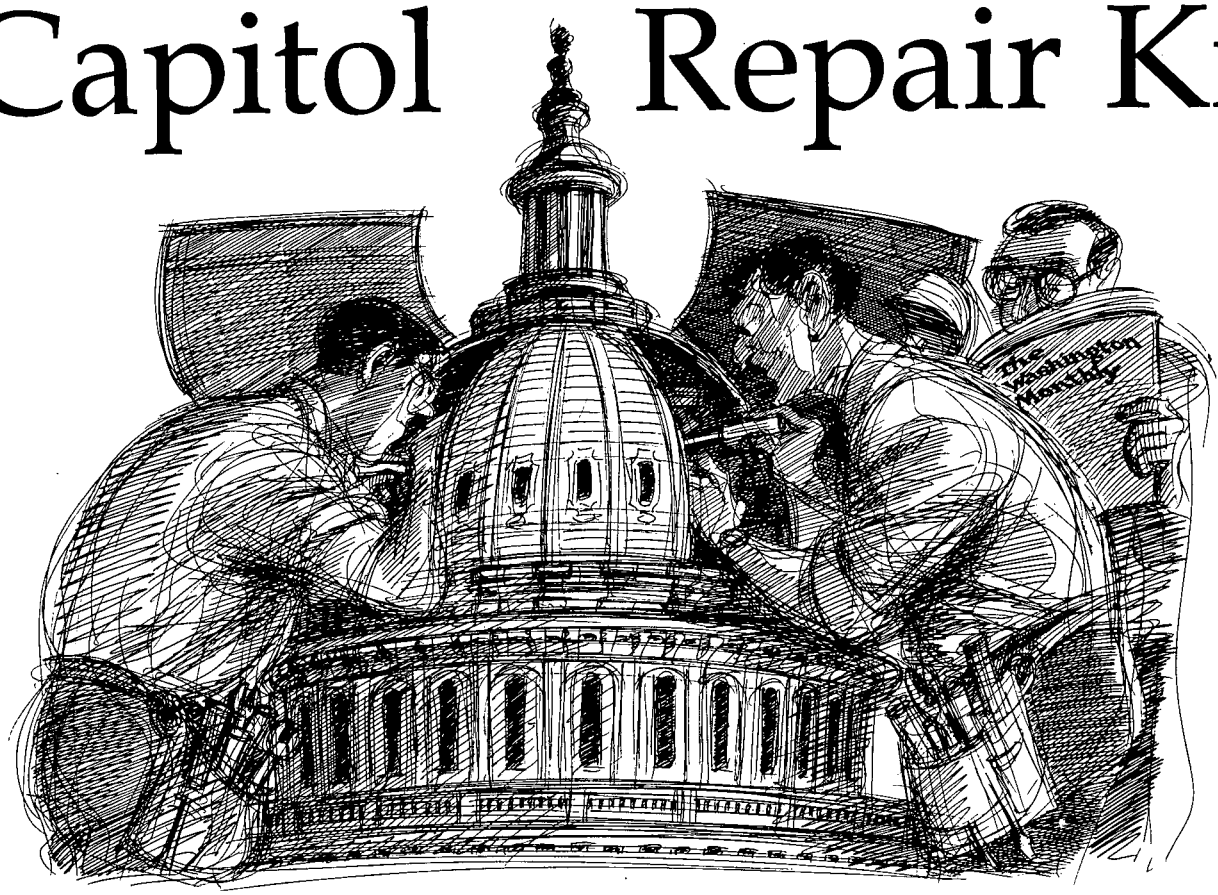

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and an appalling crassness." Yet it was his penchant for impatiently seizing moments to his best advantage—while other, more cautious souls hesitated—that enabled him to breathe a new, hip, in-yo'-face style into the black liberation movement at the time King was trying, with limited success, to expand the fight for civil rights into the murkier battlefront of economic justice. By his own admission, Jackson was a less-than-perfect leader. But no one could match the young man's charismatic presence, his gift for rhyming epigrammatical oratory, and his ability to win concessions from powerful business and political interests. Quickly and decisively, Jesse Louis Jackson moved into that vacuum of need that creates, as Archbishop Desmond Tutu once described himself, a "leader by default."

In his rare moments of genuine humility, Jackson appears willing to acknowledge that his own shortcomings have damaged his ability to achieve his goals.

Alas, it took a leader of singular audaciousness to hold together a movement in a time that no longer offered the clear moral choices presented by the era of police dogs, firehoses, belligerent Southern sheriffs, and "white" and "colored" water fountains. "Absent the great moral dramaturgy of King's day," Frady writes, "Jackson was left to struggle in the vague spiritual flats of a more prosaic and middling season to find his apotheosis, his mountaintop."

In mapping out that vague moral landscape, Frady's pursuit of the bloody shirt question exemplifies his book's greatest strength and its one annoying weakness. He provides the most thorough and trenchant study of Jackson to date, effectively picking up where *USA Today* columnist Barbara Reynolds's seminal and definitive 1975 biography, *Jesse Jackson: The Man, the Movement and the Myth*, leaves off. Yet, he sometimes tries a little too hard to explain away the very weaknesses for which Jackson should be held most accountable, for they most often have compromised his effectiveness. In the conservative backlash of the 1990s, his flaws have done more than that: They have left him (and to a disturbing degree his movement) adrift and, in Frady's words, "increasingly given to stray, darkening ruminations."

Frady, a seasoned journalist who met Jackson as a *Newsweek* reporter in the late 1960s, writes that the Jackson he experienced during two years of traveling with him was far more talkative than the man of three decades ago. Frady suspects Jackson's legendary loquaciousness (columnist Mike Royko once observed that Jackson "looks on a defenseless ear the way William 'Refrigerator' Perry eyes a roast chicken") may have been further invigorated by the happenstance of Frady's having grown up only 26 miles away from Jackson's hometown, Greenville, S.C., at about the same time. Frady was the child of a Southern Baptist minister and attended Furman University, the white school just across the street from the black neighborhood where Jackson was raised. Jackson's grandmother had taken in laundry from Furman fraternity boys. *"But here we are,"* Frady says Jackson implied to listeners on a number of occasions. *"He's running around following me after I've run for president two times, reporting on what I'm doing now...."*

Frady went on to distinguish himself at a variety of publications, most recently *The New Yorker*, and television programs. His two previous biographies, *Wallace*, about George Wallace, and *Billy Graham: A Parable of American Righteousness*, serve as appropriate prologues for the saga of Jackson, another powerfully charismatic and complicated Southerner whose story Frady tells with an appropriately Faulkneresque sensibility.

Jackson was born out of wedlock to a teen mother. His married father lived next door with his legitimate family, yet refused to acknowledge the fatherhood everyone in the neighborhood knew about. Frady reads from this what Reynolds did, not only that Jackson is driven by the need to prove he truly is "somebody," as he chants, but also that he cannot fight the feeling that he is a perpetual outsider, someone who must speak continually ("a voice for the voiceless," says Jackson) for other outsiders.

Jackson was an aspiring football player until he came under two important influences at all-black North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College in Greensboro. One was the students who participated in the historic sit-ins that desegregated the lunch counter at the local Woolworth's. The other was his girlfriend, Jackie, another daughter of poverty whose Castro-loving politics were more radical than Jackson's. Once he felt called to join the civil rights movement and to preach, he approached it with the zeal of a running back. He has not stopped running since.

After King's death, the SCLC under Abernathy

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reassigned Jackson to head Operation Breadbasket in Chicago, a Northern beachhead for the organization. But by the early 1970s, Jackson's "buy black" campaigns, his crusades for economic justice, his celebrity-studded Black Expo, and his sheer boldness made Breadbasket more famous and attractive to a new generation of black youths than the mother organization was. Disputes would drive Jackson to break away and form Operation PUSH in 1972.

His self-help project, PUSH for Excellence (PUSH Excel), founded four years before Ronald Reagan would campaign for president under the same "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" theme in 1980, attracted millions in federal dollars, thanks to former Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey. On his deathbed, Humphrey saw a profile of PUSH Excel on "60 Minutes" and called Health, Education, and Welfare Secretary Joseph Califano, who quickly agreed that, yes, it would be a good idea to kick a few million federal dollars Jesse's way.

Federal money dried up a few years later, a turn Frady blames on Reagan administration auditors and conservative Charles Murray, more recently the author of *The Bell Curve*. Murray was then a young sociologist who wrote a scathing report on PUSH Excel for the Department of Education, which resulted in the cutoff of funds. But as I wrote in the *The Washington Monthly* in 1980 (in an article Frady dutifully lists in his bibliography), PUSH Excel collapsed mainly because no one knew whether it was working. It fell prey to Jackson's notorious scattershot administration and lack of follow-through. Devoid of strong guidance at the top, local programs varied widely in content and effectiveness. Jackson's visits electrified students, but the electricity usually faded as soon as he left. "I'm a tree shaker, not a jelly maker," Jackson would rationalize. He would come to regret that line when it followed him through his two presidential campaigns.

Yet that line is the most piquantly perceptive of any Jackson has delivered about himself. Like Tom Paine, Che Guevara, and James Carville, Jackson is far more interested in agitating and organizing than in administering the day-to-day operations once the revolution is done. Unfortunately, his frenetic style left important projects like Breadbasket, Black Expo, PUSH Excel, and others to float on their own without adequate administration until they sank. Frady spends too few words on these failures and the reasons for them, compared with his lengthy descriptions of Jackson's taking Fidel Castro to church and other moments of symbols-over-substance.

In his rare moments of genuine humility, Jackson appears willing to acknowledge, if begrudgingly, that his own shortcomings have damaged his ability to achieve his desired goals. One such moment came under the spotlight of his magnificent speech at the 1984 Democratic National Convention in San Francisco: "I am not a perfect servant. I am a public servant doing my best against the odds. As I develop and serve, be patient. God is not finished with me yet."

Yet after reaching the mountaintop of seven million votes in the 1988 primaries, Jackson has been in descent. Compared with his glory days in the '60s in the front ranks of the civil rights movement, in the '70s growing his own Operation PUSH into an economic, self-help, and international force, and in the '80s as the first viable black presidential candidate, Jackson in the '90s has faded back from the cutting edge. His stunning refusal to run for mayor of the District of Columbia, a job that was his for the asking after he moved to Washington in 1989, left many of his own supporters disenchanted and echoing privately what the *Los Angeles Times* reported District Mayor Marion Barry said: "Jesse don't know how to run anything but his mouth."

With the 1994 conservative Republican takeover in Congress, Jackson's luster faded further. He hosted a CNN talk show that hardly anyone watched. He dropped hints here and there that he might mount a third campaign/crusade for president, but hardly anyone outside the Clinton White House cared. At the Million Man March, 11 years after unintentionally introducing Louis Farrakhan (who provided security for Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign) to the national spotlight, Jackson found himself as just another warm-up speaker to the Nation of Islam minister's main event.

Frady completed his reporting about the time Jackson's 31-year-old son, Jesse Jr., won the South Side Chicago congressional seat Mel Reynolds had held until his conviction for having sex with an underage girl. Days after Junior's election, Jesse Senior announced he was moving his base of operations back to PUSH headquarters in Chicago. Although announced in a spirit of triumph, it was also an unspoken admission of defeat. His move to Washington, a city with more black leaders per capita—from the Congressional Black Caucus to the District Building—than any other in the country, had not turned out as planned. Perhaps back in Chicago, a turf largely claimed in his absence by Farrakhan but his most effective base of operations in the past, he can re-establish his moral leadership on a grand national scale once again.

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"People try so hard to believe in leaders now, pitifully hard," F. Scott Fitzgerald's Amory Blaine says in *This Side of Paradise*. "But we no sooner get a popular reformer or politician or soldier or writer or philosopher—a Roosevelt, a Tolstoy, a Wood, a Shaw, a Nietzsche—than the cross-currents of criticism wash him away. My Lord, no man can stand prominence these days. It's the surest path to obscurity. People get sick of hearing the same name over and over." Many have gotten sick of hearing Jackson's name over and over, yet the cross-currents of criticism have yet to wash him away, for one simple reason: His eat-your-broccoli message may not always be wanted, but it is seldom unneeded.

Consistently, Jackson has kept King's message and moral leadership alive. He is the tree shaker in the march with schoolchildren in Chicago, family farmers in Iowa, meat packers in Wisconsin, farm workers in Texas, or hospital workers in Manhattan. He is the peacemaker with street gangs in Chicago, looters in Los Angeles, or disgruntled black delegates at the 1988 Democratic National Convention in Atlanta. His audacity rankles. He shoots from the lip. He sometimes barges into situations before he has been adequately briefed. But, as Jackson might say, he holds on to "moral authority" by virtue of his loyal constituency—"the desperate, the damned, the disinherited, the disrespected, and the despised." Voices for the voiceless are created by the times in which they live. After King, came Jackson's time. The only question now is, has Jackson's time come and gone?

Frady has written a hagiography worthy of Jackson's important place in history. But I suspect the "country preacher's" final chapters have yet to be written. As Chinese leader Liu Shao-ch'i said in the 1940s, there is no such thing as a perfect leader. Despite his imperfections, Jackson fills a need, not only for African Americans but, increasingly in the '90s, for America's political left, the stalwarts Jackson in 1988 dubbed the Democratic Party's "Jackson action faction."

Love him or hate him, he justifiably boasts an admirable moral consistency in his public life. Even when he has offended other embattled minorities, such as the Jews, he has endeavored to heal the wounds, which is more than can be said for some other leaders in these times. "All of the great leaders have had one characteristic in common: It was the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time," John Kenneth Galbraith once wrote. As long as there are moments of great social anxiety—urban unrest, black church bombings, black families run out of white neighborhoods—there will be moments for Jackson, leader by default, to seize. One suspects that, as he told the 1984 Democratic National Convention, the Lord is not finished with him yet. □

Synagogues and Civil Rights

Melissa Greene explores a deeply ambiguous time for Southern Jews

BY J. ANTHONY LUKAS

The Temple Bombing
Melissa Fay Greene, *Addison-Wesley, $25*

Five years ago, when a slim volume called *Praying for Sheetrock* appeared in my neighborhood bookstore, I wondered: What's this? A construction manual for born-again Christians? But the stark simplicity of its subtitle, "A Work of Non-Fiction," intrigued me. So I took it home and fell under the spell of Melissa Greene's luminous prose and her gripping tale of the civil rights era in McIntosh County, Georgia, a subtropical stretch of our Southern coastline I scarcely knew was there.

Praying for Sheetrock did not remain a curiosity for long. It went on to spectacular reviews, becoming a finalist for the National Book Award—it should have won, I thought—and a significant milestone in the development of late-century literary non-fiction.

Now comes *The Temple Bombing*, an account of the events surrounding the explosion that, on October

J. Anthony Lukas won his second Pulitzer prize for Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families.

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12, 1958, heavily damaged Atlanta's oldest synagogue and the fragile fabric of civility in the South's most progressive city.

The reform Jewish synagogue, invariably known as, simply, the Temple, had stood in "pillared, domed majesty" on a grassy hill above Peachtree Street for the better part of a century when someone mined it with 50 sticks of dynamite, blowing out the white marble and red brick walls, destroying offices and Sunday school classrooms, flapping the stained-glass windows "like tablecloths shaken after dinner." An hour later, a caller claiming to be "General Gordon of the Confederate Underground" told a wire service reporter, "This is the last empty building in Atlanta that we will bomb. We are going to blow up all Communist organizations. Negroes and Jews are hereby declared aliens."

General Gordon was evidently a figment of some fevered imagination, but eventually the police and FBI traced the bombing to five segregationists belonging to the National States' Rights Party. Eventually, one of them—George Bright—was tried and acquitted by a jury of 12 white males. The others were released, with prosecutors confessing they had a "very weak, circumstantial case." The true bombers of the Atlanta Temple have never been identified.

Just as she did in her first book, Greene has handled this rich material in an unconventional manner, exploring a side of this story that might not have attracted another author. Being Jewish, Greene is at least as interested in what the bombing and its aftermath tell us about Atlanta's—and the South's—Jewish community during these years as she is in the more frequently explored reaches of racial conflict during the civil rights era.

I, too, am Jewish—in my case, more a cultural, than a religious, affiliation, which I owe largely to my father, who was utterly agnostic in the spiritual realm. But Ed Lukas was a committed defender of Jewish—and black—civil liberties. Indeed, during the period Greene recounts, he was the civil rights director and general counsel of the American Jewish Committee and a leader of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights. I can remember many an evening listening to his tales of events in Little Rock, Selma, Nashville, and Atlanta—stories often focused on Jewish families caught up in many of the dilemmas that Greene so shrewdly limns here.

I knew my father's ministrations were not entirely welcomed by many Southern Jews. The year of the Temple bombing, Rabbi William S. Malev of Houston declared that, while Southern Jews "have the sovereign and unalienable right to become martyrs in the cause of desegregation," he rejected "any claim on the part of the national 'defense' organizations to impose martyrdom on the unwilling Jews of the South and to bask in their reflected glory of their self-sacrifice." "[I]f they think so much of martyrdom," Malev continued, "they ought to come down South and try it for themselves."

If the civil rights struggle was both a triumph and a torment for Southern blacks, so it was a deeply ambiguous period for Southern Jews, who had carved out a rather special niche for themselves in the caste-ridden society of the post-Civil War urban South. This was particularly true for German Jews, who had begun to emigrate to the United States after 1848. This community drew sharp distinctions between itself and the Eastern European Jews whose own hegira took place nearly a half-century later. The Germans often sneered at the newcomers' Yiddish as "piggish jargon," at their religious doctrines as "the shackles of medievalism," and, finally, at the Russian Jews themselves, whose names so often ended in "ki," as in "kikes." The Eastern European Jews, in turn, referred to the German Jews, with something less than affection, as the "Deitch-yiden."

One can understand—if not applaud—the anxieties of the assimilated German Jews when members of their community began to identify with the struggle of Southern blacks for voting rights, equal access to public accommodations, and equal educational opportunities. What would their identification with black rights do to the hard-won status of the German Jews in cities like Atlanta, New Orleans, Knoxville, and Savannah? Didn't they risk becoming pariahs again? Was it fair to ask that sacrifice of them, given the historic suffering of their people?

This is the nub of the social issue which Melissa Greene explores, for the Temple had been the religious headquarters, the very icon of Atlanta's German-Jewish community. Her evocation of the cloistered world of the "Deitch-yiden" matrons at lunch in the elegant dining room of Rich's Department Store is a marvelously executed riff, balancing social criticism and human empathy, imagining the German Jews' wish to enjoy the perquisites of their position without being bothered by the turmoil outside their gates.

"Like passengers on a cruise ship, the daily lunch crowd in Rich's Magnolia Room—with much clinking of silver against china, and chiming of ice cubes in brimming glasses, and chitchat between ladies tilted toward one another across little tables in the acute angles of intimacy—attended to their own wants.... [T]he Magnolia Room lunchers ignored the

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fact—for who wanted their noses rubbed in it all the time?—that outside the store windows a life-or-death battle raged: that some people clamored to be called human, and others conspired to deny them that."

If the Temple congregants wished to view this contentiousness only as observers, they were pushed in the opposite direction by Northern Jews and a few Southern Jewish activists. One such activist was Jacob Rothschild, the Atlanta Temple's rabbi. "Racky" Rothschild grew up "without money" in Pittsburgh, attended Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, and served on Guadalcanal. His chief asset, to the Temple's board, had been that he was a thoroughly assimilated Jew—"a veteran, a practical man, not too otherworldly, not too Jewish, a regular Joe who played poker and football and just happened to be a rabbi." The board had not intended that he shake up its membership's comfortable world, merely that he assure their continued ascension to the upper tiers of Atlanta's social structure.

But Rothschild did exactly what had not been expected: He identified powerfully with the plight of Southern blacks, and repeatedly used his pulpit to champion their cause. It was widely believed that the bombing of the Temple was in retaliation for those acts of conscience.

Greene tracked down and interviewed George Bright, who, though acquitted at trial, certainly expresses many of the racist and anti-Semitic notions that lay behind these events. This portion of the book is less successful than others: As hard as she strains for empathy, Greene's obvious contempt for Bright creeps through her prose and makes these sections both more stilted and less convincing than the passages on the Jewish community.

Although I found much to admire in *The Temple Bombing*, on balance I found it a less fully realized work than *Praying for Sheetrock*. One reason, perhaps, is that while Melissa Greene lived through the events she described in her first book, here she is reconstructing events which occurred decades ago. In any case, she seems less assured, less fully in control of her material. On too many occasions, she turns to interviews with academic authorities, or uses utterly unnecessary quotations, to buttress her own observations. But these are quibbles. She is a big new talent, rapidly rising in the ranks of those who practice the craft of evocative non-fiction. □

The Agony of Victory

How Bill Clinton's madcap style—and the perils of the presidency—make the West Wing a tough place to work

BY ELEANOR CLIFT

Madhouse
Jeffrey Birnbaum, *Times Books, $25*

Jeffrey Birnbaum's new book, *Madhouse*, is about the madcap style of President Clinton and how it disrupts the lives of his closest aides. It is not a new theme, and it is hard to feel too sorry for the six people chronicled—four of whom have already gone on to pastures made greener by their short stays in the White House. Birnbaum is an excellent reporter, and in true newsmagazine style he delivers a narrative that is rich in anecdotal detail. But one cannot help feeling this is one long yuppie whine. It's tough to work at the top at IBM as well, and the rewards are typically not so great.

If there is a bigger point to *Madhouse*, it is the way in which hopes and dreams are dashed in Washington. Clinton's first two years, the period Birnbaum covers, disappointed even his staunchest loyalists. The aides who arrived starry-eyed from the campaign trail were particularly vulnerable to post-promise traumatic syndrome. Populist rhetoric is one thing; turning it into reality is quite another. "When you were a little kid watching Bobby Kennedy and

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dreaming of social justice, did you ever imagine whispering in the President's ear, 'Sir, there was a big bond rally today'?" speechwriter Michael Waldman asked of economic adviser Gene Sperling after they had finished briefing Clinton for an important speech. Standing in the back of the Indian Treaty Room, waiting for Clinton to speak, the two aides laughed so hard they had to turn their backs to avoid creating a scene.

This was a welcome moment of humor in a series of profiles that turn mostly on the personal sacrifices of the White House staff. Long hours, strained relationships at home, and periodic self-assessments as to whether any job is worth this much grief have combined to make the average tenure of a White House aide 18 months, Birnbaum reports. Some of the people Birnbaum writes about were miscast from the beginning. Stars on the campaign trail, they were ill-suited to governing and didn't do their jobs well, or easily. Clinton himself has said that he made a fundamental error after his election in concentrating so heavily on the makeup of his Cabinet, and assuming he could successfully staff his White House with mostly youthful campaign aides under the supervision of the genial but terminally indecisive Mack McLarty.

With the exception of press secretary Dee Dee Meyers, the people Birnbaum profiles are not well-known outside the Beltway, or even inside the Beltway. They are the ordinary people who populate a White House, and Birnbaum's reporting allows the reader to imagine what it would be like to live in their skin. Howard Paster, a seasoned professional in his 40s and Clinton's chief lobbyist for the first tumultuous year, knew after only five months on the job that he could not sustain the pace, or the criticism. He set his alarm most mornings for 4:30 a.m., then battled his way through 18-hour days where getting the simplest decision was a monumental undertaking. He took the blame for some of Clinton's failures before departing for an exalted position with a top public-relations firm.

Jeff Eller had bounced around a number of Democratic campaigns before lucking into the winning Clinton campaign in '92. He had a mid-level job in the press office when he caught the First Lady's eye with the aggressive way he kept photographers away from her father's funeral. (He placed vans between the photographers and the church.) Mrs. Clinton was so pleased with Eller's work that she asked him to take over the communication of her health-care reform plan—a thankless task, as it turned out. Then Eller was called in as the communications expert to advise how to handle press reaction to the proposed firing of seven travel office employees. "Give them their notices," he counseled, arguing that swift firings would allow the White House "to get out ahead of the story." Three years later, the White House still has not caught up. It was Eller's misfortune, Birnbaum observes, "to have made a mistake in a place where any error is a catastrophe."

Domestic adviser Bruce Reed, a devout "New Democrat," and Gene Sperling, a Mario Cuomo liberal, are the yin and yang of Clinton's policy leanings, and the only two of those profiled who are still diligently laboring in the White House. Serious policy wonks, they struggle to reconcile their differences—and to advance a Clintonesque agenda. "He looks for things that government can do," Reed said of Sperling. "I look for things that government ought to stop doing." The inherent contradiction of Clinton's ideology is embodied in these two aides, who nonetheless remain steadfast friends.

Paul Begala got his first dose of reality on Inauguration Day, when his seats for the ceremony were so far away he could barely see the President he had helped elect. Unlike his partner, James Carville, who thumbed his nose at government from the start, Begala tried to fit in as a part-time strategist and speechwriter. But the autonomy he enjoyed during the '92 campaign vanished as Clinton, beset by a series of early fumbles, lost confidence in his campaign consultants and began listening to other voices, including that of David Gergen, who had worked in three Republican White Houses. Begala found himself increasingly on the periphery. After the '94 election, he moved to Austin, Texas, with his family. He only regretted he had not done it sooner.

That the Clintons regarded the press as a pesky feature of democracy that could somehow be walled off and contained made Dee Dee Meyers's task as the first female press secretary a mission impossible. She was sent out to the briefing room as quarry for frustrated reporters. Reducing White House briefers to bloody pulps is the press corps' specialty. It is a tribute to Meyers that she escaped after two years with her professional standing and good humor intact. Birnbaum's portrayal of Meyers's long goodbye reveals the unseemly way people in power are forced out. Readers will be both appalled and fascinated by the teary scene in the Oval Office when Meyers succeeded in winning a stay of execution from the President.

The many books that chronicle the inner workings of the Clinton presidency reflect the press corps' fascination with an administration that is so much like

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itself in terms of age, outlook, and experience. Birnbaum successfully reveals the lives behind the titles, and how easily events can spin out of control, both professionally and personally. For anybody contemplating a job in the White House, or wondering what it is really like behind the glamour, *Madhouse* is a sobering read.

Clinton has cleaned up his act in the last eighteen months, but even so, life in any White House is chaotic. The stakes are high, the press is always watching, and there is no margin for error. Birnbaum concludes that the presidency is "a train wreck waiting to happen," regardless of who is in the Oval Office. "Even with the aid of an able staff, a single official cannot at the same time dictate the laws of the land like a king, negotiate compromises like a prime minister, and also act as a spiritual leader. But that is what the public expects." This recipe for disillusionment should no longer surprise those who pass through the iron gates on Pennsylvania Avenue. □

Drawing on Idealism

Garry Trudeau shows us hypocrisy, greed, and indifference—and still finds reason to hope

BY JOSHUA WOLF SHENK

Flashbacks: Twenty-Five Years of Doonesbury
Garry Trudeau, *Andrews and McMeel, $18.95*

In the beginning, there was B.D. In the first block of the first strip of "Doonesbury," the football-helmeted, stone-faced character sits in an armchair, with a blank college pennant hanging on the wall. Then Mike Doonesbury walks in. Over time, the rest of the cast—Mark Slackmeyer, Boopsie, Zonker and the rest—climbed out of Garry Trudeau's brain and onto his drafting table. At first, their lives swirled around dorms and football fields. Then B.D. dropped out of college to fight in Vietnam. Mark latched onto the war as well—from the other side. (Lucky callers to his radio show received not t-shirts or records but free copies of the Pentagon Papers.)

The characters had entered history. And history answered back. "If anyone is going to find any defendant guilty," *The Washington Post* scolded after a series of merciless strips on Watergate, "it's going to be the due process of justice, not a comic strip artist." Years later, Trudeau tore into the town of Palm Beach, Florida, where blacks and Hispanics were randomly stopped by police under a law that required domestic servants to register with the police. The law was repealed. The ultimate example of life imitating Doonesbury came out in 1994, when a stolen carton of Brown & Williamson documents arrived at the office of a University of California professor; the return address read simply "Mr. Butts."

"Doonesbury" is a paradox—politico-cultural satire that runs alongside "Marmaduke" and "Cathy" in hundreds of American newspapers (and on editorial or feature pages in others); a comic strip as comfortable with wars and financial crises as with domestic humor. (The Persian Gulf War occupied the strip for almost 250 straight days.) But the principal peculiarity is this: In a fictional world populated by a carrot-nosed ad man, a retired sun-tanning champion, two homeless eccentrics, and two Slackmeyers—the inside-trading, Reagan-loving, tobacco company-lobbying father and his liberal, gay, public radio host son—Trudeau creates a world that is in many ways more *real* than the world viewed through traditional journalism. Blending actual figures and events with fiction, Trudeau achieves a clarity that often eludes more restricted forms. His portrait of Jimmy Carter manning the White House switchboard or Ronald Reagan carrying cue cards for a cabinet meeting—("Sit down in chair. You unbutton coat (optional). Do not remove shoes")—are strikingly authentic. By collapsing entire industries into a single character—Sid Kibbitz speaks for Hollywood, Mr. Butts for the tobacco industry, Duke for the sleaze-du-jour—and planting his characters at such spectacles

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as the O.J. Simpson trial, Trudeau achieves a sort of X-ray camera effect, providing a glimpse of the truth behind the vagaries and obfuscations and P.R. campaigns that dominate so much of public discourse. One strip shows a lobbyist in Al D'Amato's reception area trying to see the senator "about my bid on a HUD contract." Rebuffed, he writes a $5,000 check. "I hope I'm not being too ... uh ... forward here," he says. He's told not to worry. "What a relief. I mean, there are senators who would call the police." "Don't be silly," the secretary says. "Let me give you our brochure."

At times, as in the Palm Beach case, Trudeau has demonstrably forced political change. But mostly he has engaged minds, stirred controversy, and provided an example of a popular medium that appeals to the best in us without sanctimony, and preaches without raising its voice above a wry whisper.

Trudeau's success over the last 25 years—the strip now runs in 1,600 daily and Sunday papers and regularly commands the attention of the public figures it features—also should give hope to this country's beleaguered liberals. When he began drawing "Bull Tales" for the *Yale Daily News* in 1968, liberalism was beginning its sharp descent. Today, "conservative" is a positive modifier and "liberal" an epithet. On "Larry King Live" recently, Hillary Clinton even denied that she was a member of the species.

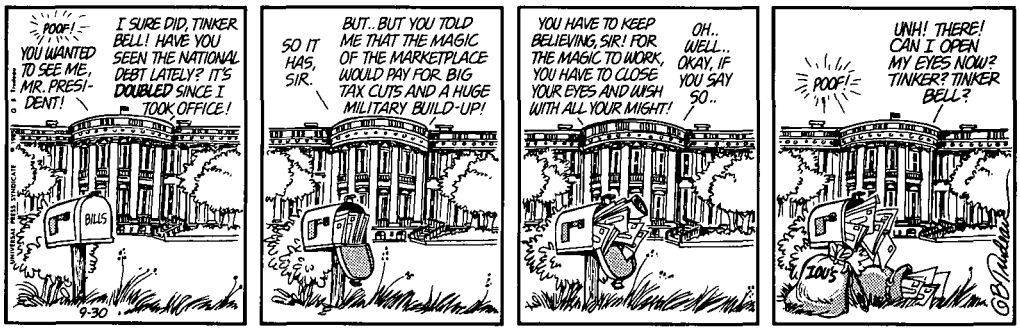
Many liberals see cause for their decline in the fact that conservative ideas are more easily compressed into soundbites. But if there's anything that "Doonesbury" reminds us, it's that liberal values can be expressed succinctly, powerfully, and with a sense of humor. More importantly, Trudeau's liberalism isn't one of interest groups and hot-button issues, but of broad values of decency, opportunity, and fairness. The implicit and explicit arguments of his strips are that the disadvantaged are human and deserve a hand-up; that well-off businesses and individuals should adhere to standards of decency like the rest of us; that government has a role to play in protecting and preserving a good life for its citizens.

Trudeau punctures conservative fantasies by carrying their ideas to the logical—and preposterous—extreme. Like supply-side economics. When the elder Slackmeyer is defending the Reagan economic plan, he beckons his servant, Jonah. "Why, his people are 100% behind supply-side economics! Isn't that right, Jonah?"

Jonah: "Oh, yes, sir. We're very excited by the trickle-down effect."

Slackmeyer: "See? Hell, they've got safety nets coming out their ears."

Seeing those words—"We're very excited by the trickle-down effect"—actually spoken by a working stiff puts the dissonance and illogic of supply-side theory in full relief. Another strip from 1981 shows an oil executive (recurring character Jim Andrews) gloating over James Watt's proposals to "restore mountaintop mining, expand offshore oil drilling, ease strip-mining," etc. His wife asks what's to keep people like him from ruining lands, air, and water.



Jim: "Um... Wait a minute... That's in here somewhere... Ah, here it is! 'The goodness of our hearts.'"

Wife: "Oh, is that like states' rights?"

Returning to these strips touches off déjà vu—a sign that Trudeau's influence has been limited. But it's also a sign of his prescience and his ability to, in a reverse of the common saying, send the truth halfway around the world before the lie gets its pants on. The strip is liberated from "objectivity"—even the facts. If Trudeau thinks inventing a character or a scene will help him get at a larger truth, he does it. In itself, that's not so rare—comedians do it all the time. But Trudeau's blend of fiction, satire, and news is not merely comic relief. It's the real world.

At the same time, it's not an accident that Trudeau won the Pulitzer Prize in 1975 not for cartooning but for commentary; this strip is as much about journalism as it is about humor. In August 1995—well before the mainstream media did substantive reporting

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on the perils of the Republican plan for rules on the environment, health, and safety—a series of strips portrayed lobbyists rewriting the Clean Air Act and other laws. Well before the national press caught on, Trudeau broke the story nationally that Brett Kimberlin, a small-time dealer who said he sold pot to Dan Quayle, was given unusually stiff punishment by federal prison officials and kept from speaking publicly. Trudeau's predictive ability sometimes borders on the eerie: In 1971, B.D. proclaimed Ronald Reagan his "hero." In 1984 a character worried that he would "wake up someday in a country run by Newt Gingrich."

Of course, Trudeau can hardly be called an obedient follower of the liberal line. Bill Clinton, represented in "Doonesbury" by a waffle soaked in butter and syrup, can't claim Trudeau's loyalty the way that, say, Gingrich claims Limbaugh's. And Trudeau regularly mocks the left's tendency towards identity politics. When a black faculty member visits President King of the strip's fictional college with news from the African-American caucus, the president buries his head in his hands. "So what is it now?" he asks. "Um," replies the visitor. "The kids want their own water fountains." This strip has extra punch in the context of "Doonesbury's" wide range of personalities and groups. The point isn't tokenism, but to illuminate the challenges and triumphs of different experiences. The gay characters encounter discrimination and misunderstanding, but they persist. When Mike loses his job, and J.J. drives a cab to pay the bills, this reflects a bitter reality of American life.

Trudeau also pushes issues that most liberals won't touch. Like the drug war, for example. Though it eats up an increasing share of government budgets and has devastated the poor communities it is supposed to help, the war continues to escalate. Trudeau cuts straight through the hypocrisy when Mr. Butts (with Miss Nickie, a pack of nicotine gum) pays a visit to William Bennett, who admits to being addicted to nicotine, but nevertheless defines prohibition of heroin, marijuana, and cocaine as a *moral* issue. "How many deaths a year did the Surgeon General implicate me in?" Mr. Butts asks the drug czar. "About 395,000, right? ... Meanwhile, poor Mr. Jay doesn't have a single death to his credit, and you spend billions trying to eradicate him." Mr. Jay is a walking marijuana joint.

"Wake up and smell the smoke," Mr. Butts tells Bennett. "You're an addict! The fact that your drug of choice is legal, and another can send you to jail, is an accident of history! Let's stop driving addicts underground and start helping them! ... It's time to formulate policy for the post-prohibition era."

"Over my dead body," Bennett answers. "That's a possibility, honey," Miss Nickie says.

Many perceive a meanness in Trudeau because he goes after individuals. "There is a genteel school of satire," he writes in the introduction to *Flashbacks*, "that holds that the practitioner should spare the individual and attack the larger vice." He cites "the good-natured, Will Rogers–style put-down of politicians for their hypocrisy or lawyers for their greed" that gets good laughs, without making any one individual suffer. But Trudeau's response is that that tradition "is at heart profoundly cynical." "Categorical attacks," he writes, "leave no room for hope. This explains, I suppose, my personal taste for the ad hominem. I prefer to attack a Dan Rostenkowski or a Johnny Cochran in the specific, because such satire implies—or should—that there are moral choices in life, that not everyone behaves this way, and with reason."

When greedy businessmen, sleazy personalities, or superficial politicians find themselves mocked in "Doonesbury," the purpose isn't laughs for laughs' sake, but to tweak the noses of those who don't stay focused on solving problems and helping people. The strip is enormously skeptical—but ultimately idealistic. When Mike is asked to make a spot pitching cigarettes to kids—Mr. Butts springs from his guilty nightmares—we see from his conundrum that much of life is a struggle of good people confronted with hard choices. But the consistent message of the strip is that it *is* still possible for individuals to make the right decisions, and for the political system to be honest and effective. To many, these ideas are pie-in-the-sky. To listen to Rush Limbaugh, you'd believe that it's impossible for government to work—we might as well turn the whole deal over to Philip Morris and Time-Warner. Even many mainstream journalists have passed the threshold from skepticism to cynicism. That's why "Doonesbury"—often buried deep in these papers—is such a breath of fresh air.

It might seem incongruous for such lofty purposes to be wrapped in a comic strip—occasionally a "Doonesbury" strip will stay serious for all four frames, but it's rare. Still, there's much to be said for helping us laugh at life's absurdities. Making government effective and relevant, stigmatizing greed and selfishness ... these aren't small-time goals but lifetime projects. At a point, wringing hands and moralizing is not an asset but an impediment. When Andy Lippincott is dying of AIDS, he keeps making light of his own tragedy. Joanie Caucus asks him: "Andy. How can you make jokes?" And he answers, "How could you not?" □

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Political Booknotes

An American Requiem: God, My Father, and the War that Came Between Us
James Carroll
Houghton Mifflin, $23.95
by Colman McCarthy

Current Catholic teaching—if I have this right—allows members of the flock a number of theological choices on the issue of people killing each other in armed governmental combat. If you believe in the "just war" theory, as did bishops on the German and French sides in World War II, fine. If you are selective about favoring wars, fine again. If you are conscientiously against all wars always, in the manner of such Catholic pacifists as Dorothy Day and Daniel Berrigan, no problem here, either. It wasn't for nothing that James Joyce liked to say of the Catholic Church, "Here comes everybody."

The family of three-star General Joseph Carroll, the director of the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency during most of the war in Southeast Asia, was one where the choosing took a fierce turn. The general, an Americanist who ardently believed in the moral rightness of his nation's military adventures, saw Vietnam as a just war. His son James, second of the five Carroll boys raised on General's Row next to General Curtis LeMay's manse at a Washington air base, condemned the U.S. role as "immoral savagery."

Was the son concluding, therefore, that his military father, tight with Robert McNamara and Cardinal Francis Spellman, a man who blessed bombers in Vietnam, was an immoral savage? The answer, far beyond the boundaries of a yes or no, emerges slowly and gracefully in this well-crafted narrative about a family rended by conflict and, like the nation, knowing little of the art of unhurtful conflict resolution.

James Carroll, a husband and father in his mid-50s, is a novelist and teacher living in Boston, where he writes a weekly column for *The Boston Globe*. After a year at Georgetown University in 1961, where he was honored as ROTC Cadet of the Year, Carroll chose the priesthood and entered the novitiate of the Paulist Fathers. In early 1969, he was ordained in New York by Terrence Cardinal Cooke, the U.S. military vicar. He celebrated his first Mass the next day at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Chapel at Bolling Air Force Base in Washington, his parents' home parish.

I was at that Mass to write a piece for *The Washington Post* about Carroll. The news was that this young independent-thinking priest signed on just when others of the collar were departing in protest over one Vatican policy or another. The Mass was meant to be a grace-giving sacramental moment. Carroll, surrounded by his proud dad and fellow brass in their dress blues, was introduced by the Air Force chaplain as God's newest chosen one: "In a day when our society is so disjointed, it is a great joy to know that Father Carroll is on our side."

Again, please? Two years before, as a Paulist seminarian, Carroll had been one of tens of thousands chanting antiwar slogans at the Pentagon within sight of his father's third-floor window. The general never saw his son, nor suspected he was, in the father's phrase, a "kook" protester. In his maiden sermon, Carroll stuck to a benign text from the prophet Ezekiel, with a reference to death and bones "burned by time and by desert wind, by the sun." Then Carroll added, "and by napalm."

He recalls: "It was as specific as I dared get—or as I needed to. Others in that congregation may not have felt the dead weight of that word, but I knew my father would, and so would the other generals.... Napalm embodied the perversion of the Air Force, how 'Off we go into the wild blue yonder' had become the screeches of children. There was a sick silence in the chapel."

At a reception at the Officers' Club after the service, no generals showed. So mutinied against, the humiliated father would never understand nor forgive. Lifelong alienation marked the rest of the relationship. It didn't help that five years later, Carroll, in his words, "would violate his solemn vow and leave the priesthood." He had been a chaplain at Boston University, organizing antiwar protests and getting busted and jailed. "Holiness had ceased to be an ambition of mine," he writes, "which may have been the problem. To me, Jesus was not holy. Why should I be?"

At 60, General Carroll, after being transferred and demoted when he broke publicly with Defense Secretary Melvin Laird on a policy matter, retired from the Air Force. As the Pentagon was losing a war outside its walls, General Carroll was taking a hard hit inside.

This is no happy-ending tale, with a father–son reconciliation scene where they embrace each other heart-to-heart even if they never saw eye-to-eye. The general had Alzheimer's disease and died at 80, in January 1991, "an almost entirely broken man."

One weakness stands out among the many strengths of this memoir: the absence of a full definition or broad description of the pacifist philosophy. It's not enough to refer to the influence of the Berrigans or offer allusions to a

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"SNAP THIS SUCKER UP."*

"Carville may not speak softly but he carries a big swatter."
—*Chicago Tribune*

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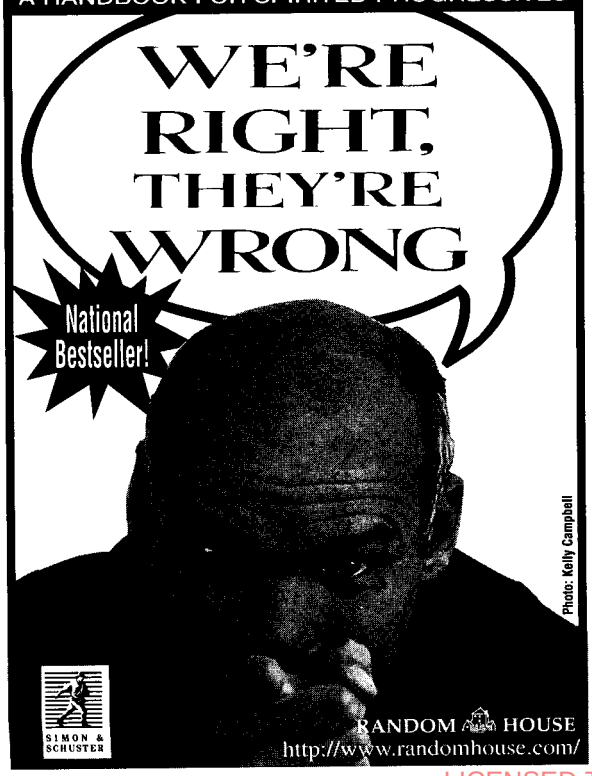
—**The Washington Monthly*

"A rambunctious and amusing defense of liberalism and its concern for the common man."
—*Time*

"Brings as much passion to defending government as the Republicans do to attacking it."
—*The New York Times Book Review*

JAMES CARVILLE
A HANDBOOK FOR SPIRITED PROGRESSIVES



"throng of Catholic lefties." Critics of pacifism mistakenly, or bullheadedly, equate it with passivity, when it is much the opposite.

Carroll's failure may be traceable to his not being a pacifist, in fact. All too stirringly, he wrote in the *Globe* of his support for sending the U.S. military to Bosnia. Surely General Joe Carroll would have rallied 'round that intervention, too. Father and son would not have been so far apart after all.

Colman McCarthy writes for The Washington Post *and is the director of the Center for Teaching Peace.*

A River Lost: The Life and Death of the Columbia
Blaine Harden
W. W. Norton and Company, $25
By Phil Keisling

As an award-winning *Washington Post* reporter, Blaine Harden has spent much of the last decade chronicling the intense—and often bloody—tribal and ethnic conflicts of sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe.

Harden's boyhood home of Moses Lake, Washington, where he returned to write this book about the once-magnificent Columbia river, is certainly not Bosnia. But Harden's keen eye—and his ability to get many of his subjects to drop their guards and articulate their prejudices and rationalizations—makes for a dismaying account of greed, short-sightedness, and natural catastrophe in the name of "progress."

Two hundred years ago, Lewis and Clark encountered a wild river of rushing cataracts and plentiful salmon. Salmon were the center of Native American life, in terms of religion and culture as well as diet. (Some anthropologists have put their annual per capita consumption at over 800 pounds.) But the river, its fish, and the culture they spawned have become pale reflections of their former selves. Today, the Columbia is what Harden calls a "machine river," controlled and manipulated by more than a dozen major dams. The dams have transformed the river into a series of slow-moving (and now navigable) pools; Lewiston, Idaho, more than 400 miles from the Pacific, is now a major *port* city. Irrigation water from the Columbia and its tributaries have made the proverbial desert bloom with everything from world-famous red delicious apples to potatoes for 80 percent of the nation's french fries.

But at what price? The massive federal dam-building efforts certainly brought prosperity. Indeed, Harden's own father left a Depression-devastated farm in Montana to find well-paying work in the Pacific Northwest boom towns that sprang up around such structures as the Grand Coulee Dam. But through most of the Columbia River Basin, the salmon are either going or already gone, and an entire way of life with them. In one poignant scene, Harden describes an 86-year-old Native American elder, irate about being consigned to eating salmon from a can.

Many salmon runs were squelched outright by high dams (like Grand Coulee) that lacked fish ladders and thus closed off thousands of river miles to migrating salmon. A little less clear

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is what's causing the Northwest's remaining runs to plummet toward extinction. Is it the dams with their mighty turbines and long spillways? Diseases introduced by hatchery fish? Bad timber and farming practices that choke spawning streams with silt? Slow water that makes young salmon easy prey to predators? Or—as various irrigators, barge pilots, and civic boosters allege—is it simply too many seals or Native American poachers?

Harden doesn't even attempt an answer. His book focuses on character sketches, not science or history. Sometimes it works well. A local professor is a rare hero for risking his career to reveal the phony economics of further irrigation. Unfortunately, too many characters seem chosen for their willingness to share narrow-minded, even racist opinions. It's too easy, actually, to find echoes of Bosnia.

For Harden, it all adds up to a somewhat dark, resigned conclusion: The Columbia River system isn't going to be "undone" of its many dams and irrigation canals anytime soon, and it's likely the conflicts—and the blame game—will persist. Meanwhile, the barges will continue to ply the river, the agribusinesses will keep defending their subsidies, and the dams will continue to generate some of the world's cheapest electricity. And while the major beneficiaries continue to gain, what were once the most extraordinary salmon runs on the planet will likely continue their decline.
Phil Keisling, a Monthly *contributing editor, is Oregon's secretary of state.*

The Murrow Boys
Stanley Cloud and Lynne Olson
Houghton Mifflin, $27.95
By Sandra McElwaine

In *The Murrow Boys*, co-authors Stanley Cloud and Lynne Olson have set the scene for a saga of war and peace and human frailty: the good and bad times of revered CBS correspondent Edward R. Murrow and his devoted acolytes. With a wealth of fascinating material, neatly tied together through a series of mini-biographies, Cloud and Olson give the reader a front-row seat for the cataclysmic events that helped shape America and the world before, during, and after World War II.

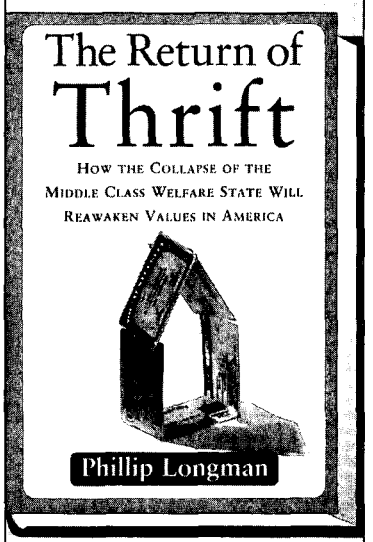
This trailblazing cadre of combat correspondents included the intellectual William L. Shirer, Murrow's original hire, and ultimately his closest confidant and alter ego; the master writer Eric Sevareid; the flamboyant Charles Collingwood; the intrepid Larry Leseur; and Mary Marvin Breckenridge, the sole woman to penetrate the inner circle of Murrow's macho male fiefdom.

As the war dragged on, the elite band grew. To fulfill Murrow's directive to "paint pictures in the air," the Boys parachuted out of crippled airplanes, went along on bombing raids over Germany (Murrow himself went on 25), and waded ashore under fire. They defied censors—and their own executives—in order to scoop their competitors. They wrote best-sellers, became the first celebrity journalists, and turned radio, and CBS, into the primary source for on-the-spot news.

In peacetime, however, radio became an appendage. Television had arrived and serious journalism was relegated to the back burner. Though Murrow and some of the Boys became rich and famous, they never regained the glory years. Friendships suffered as they squabbled among themselves. The low point came during the witch hunts of the McCarthy era of the early 1950s. Outraged by loyalty oath requirements, the Boys were dismayed when Murrow registered no objection and advised each of them to sign. It was not until 1954, in a famous special edition of "See It Now," that Murrow finally took to the airwaves to denounce the Wisconsin senator. For many, it came too late.

In 1961, the Murrow era came to an end when CBS let him go. Some of his protégés lingered on, but for all the Boys, the best of times lay in the past. Still, this tiny band of remarkable reporters had electrified a nation and forever changed broadcast journalism.
Sandra McElwaine is a Washington-based journalist.

"An unstinting look at the culture of middle-class entitlements and their implications for the 21st century."*



"An unsparing and unnerving audit of the cost of so-called entitlements which makes the debate on balancing the federal budget appear all but irrelevant." —*Kirkus Reviews*

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*Senator Bill Bradley

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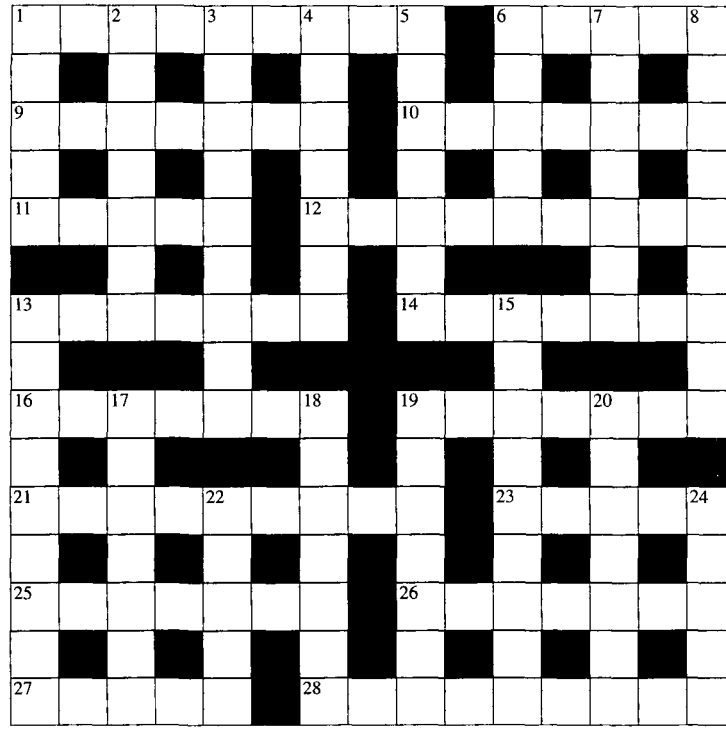
Political Puzzle

BY JOHN BARCLAY

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words—thus (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, such as USA, are treated as one word.



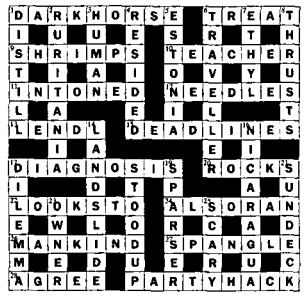
Across

1. Leader getting any tuna he ordered. (9)
6. Assassin's target displaying addled brain. (5)
9. Quiet flower for New Frontiersman. (7)
10. Type of verses cast in a collection. (7)
11. Athlete would be more dangerous trailing Rhode Island. (5)
12. Substitutions upset star ferns. (9)
13. Pact opposing line. (7)
14. Tailoring suit in a foreign land. (7)
16. Former meter adjustment is outrageous. (7)
19. City ref managed to make formal report. (7)
21. Awkward turn around a friend without effort. (9)
23. Ritual bath I set up. (5)
25. Currency as droll exchange. (7)
26. Fix, but role is changed. (7)
27. Leader of Paris Pops? (5)
28. Cross cues differently, e.g., 1 to 27. (9)

Down

1. Homes set off between poles. (5)
2. Wrenching turn on riots. (7)
3. Traded on Vermeer for the last time. (9)
4. Refreshed deer ate stew. (7)
5. FedEx competitor, sharp and presumptuous entrant. (7)
6. Services mangled tires. (5)
7. Standards for censors? (7)
8. Any recess scheduled for toilet facility. (9)
13. Messy nude place did very well. (7,2)
15. December export site furnished help on rot. (5,4)
17. Fink shaking rattle after start of test. (7)
18. Silent "e" confused recruits. (7)
19. Puzzle 199 about transportation company and Kennedy boat. (7)
20. Assimilates in interim bib estimate. (7)
22. Backs raises. (5)
24. Possessive legatee after last of loot. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:



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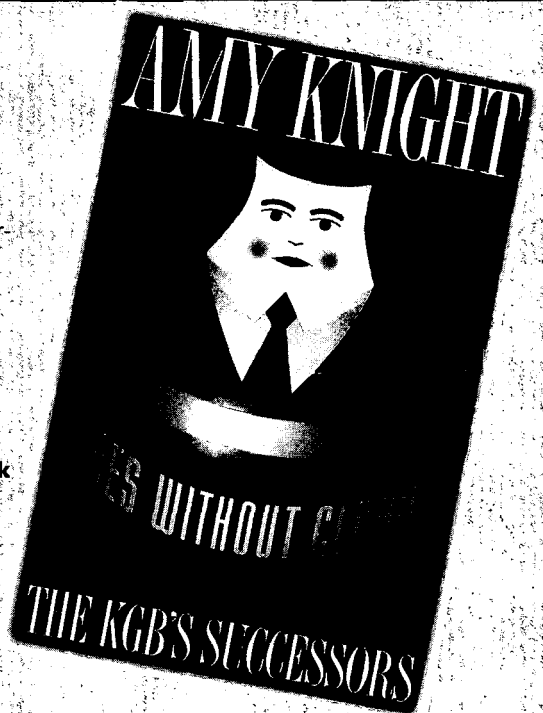
AMY KNIGHT



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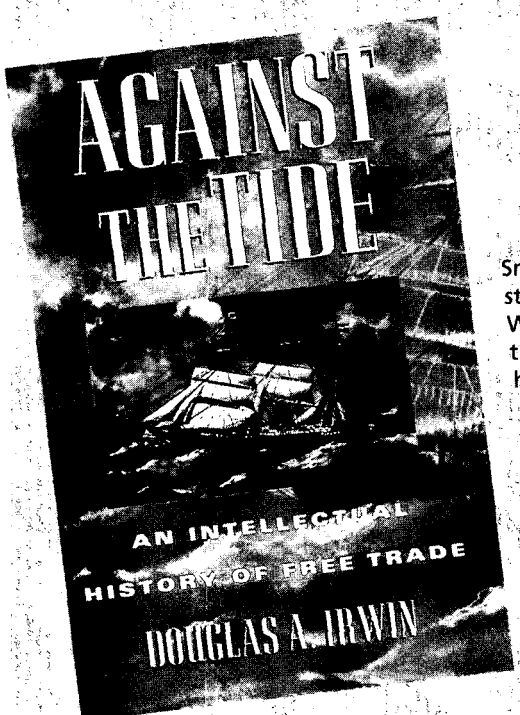

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